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Robin Hood,

THE OUTLAWED EARL;

OR,

THE MERRY MEN OF THE GREENWOOD.

A Tale of the Days of the Lion Heart.

BY PROF. STEWART GILDERSLEEVE.

CHAPTER I. SCATHELOCK.

A BRIGHT, breezy morning in May, when the young leaves had taken their freshest green, while the birds were singing in the branches overhead, making the woods ring with melody. Sherwood Forest, with its glorious old oaks and

beeches, its purling brooks and open glades, is beautiful at any time, even when the brown leaves cover the earth with a rustling carpet, while the wind sighs in the bare branches. But Sherwood in spring, with its green glades, besprinkled with cowslips, scenting the air with a perfume that the breeze carries for miles; Sherwood, with its violets hiding under their broad leaves in the shade of the great trees; birds rocking in their little nests on the topmost branches of the larch; hares scudding from path to path; great, red stags and timid does feeding in the remotest recesses, while spotted harts and hinds flit across every glade: Sherwood in spring is a paradise to the woodsman.

So thought a young man, with long, golden curls of hair, that flowed over his shoulders, as he strolled lightly along in a secluded part of the forest, whistling softly to himself and smiling as a man perfectly happy. He was dressed

in a hunting-suit of green velvet; his unstrung bow hung at his back, and he bore his great quarter-staff in his hand, but he did not seem to be thinking of a use for either of these weapons in the blessed spring weather that filled his heart with such pleasure.

To a man full of such peaceful and happy thoughts any interruption is unwelcome, and therefore, it was with an indescribable feeling, of repugnance that the wanderer heard another whistle answering his own, and distinguished the figure of a stranger coming down one of the deer-paths toward him. As he came closer, there was something in the appearance of the stranger so singularly aggressive and impudent, that the young man in green instinctively realized that he was about to meet an enemy. Those were wild and lawless times, it must be remembered, when men carried arms even on the king's open highway, and the recesses of Sher-



TWANG! WENT THE GREAT BOW AGAIN, AND ANOTHER MAN FELL, WHEN THE REST MADE A DESPERATE RUSH FOR THE NEAREST TREES.

wood Forest were notoriously full of outlaws, poachers and others. Therefore, our forest wanderer advanced to meet the stranger, certain in his heart that it would end in a fight between them.

The new-comer was a tall young fellow in red clothes, with a lithe, active frame, dark-brown hair flowing in curls over his shoulders, bold brown eyes, and a saucy turned-up nose, with an expression of face that was defiant to the last degree, as he looked at him of the green coat.

"Hey, gay fellow, with the velvet jerkin," he said, as he approached. "Thou look'st a proper man to rove the greenwood, forsooth. Some of these Norman popinjays, I warrant. Canst shoot, gay fellow?"

"Ay, that can I, on occasion," replied the other, as he scanned the form of the stranger critically, noting that he was armed like himself, and bore a similar staff.

"I'll wager a rose noble I can beat thee," said the new-comer, in the same aggressive tone, which seemed to suit his whole appearance, and the scarlet jerkin and hose which he wore—fighting colors from top to toe, and fighting manners to match.

As he spoke, he leaned his staff against a tree, took his bow from his back, and began to bend and string it.

The young man halted, and regarded his preparations with a smile.

"What wouldst do?" he asked, as the stranger drew an arrow from his quiver and began to place it on the string. The other made no reply beyond raising the bow, and another moment would have seen the arrow piercing the breast of the man in green, when the latter, with a sudden rapid blow of his quarter-staff, struck the bow just above the stranger's hand with such force as to knock it out of his grasp and send it flying.

"Aha! thou'rt a man of thy hands!" cried Red Jacket, with a fierce laugh, and apparently no wise abashed. "We'll see what else thou canst do with that staff of thine."

As he spoke, the young man in red, as nimble as a cat, ran to the tree where he had left his quarter-staff, picked it up, and came leaping down on the other, brandishing the huge weapon in circles on either side of his head, and shouting:

"Have at thee, gay fellow! Now we'll see who is best man."

In another moment, these two young men, who had never seen each other before, and had no earthly cause for enmity, were engaged in a fierce conflict with their great two-handed staves, striking rapid blows with force enough to fell an ox, had they taken effect.

But in the play of quarter-staff for every blow there is a good guard. The man in green proved himself at once to be a perfect master of the quarter-staff, and his opponent was noway behind him. At first they both employed the same guard, holding one hand in the middle of the staff and shifting the other in and out, dealing blows alternately with each end of the weapon. They would advance and retreat, leap back and to either side, always holding the staff so as to cover the body, and seeking for an instant of time or an inch of space unguarded. The rattle of the continual blows sounded like the clatter of a mill, and thus they kept up the contest for several minutes of incessant hard work, till their breath came hard and short, and the sweat poured from their faces.

At last the stranger, after a close rally, in which he had displayed uncommon activity and fierceness, altered his tactics.

Throwing up his long staff in the air till he grasped it with both hands by the end, he made a sudden stride forward and fetched a mighty blow at the head of his foe. Coming with such a leverage, its force was tremendous, and although Green Jacket warded it off, he did so imperfectly. The heavy staff, glancing down, struck off his gay cap and grazed his skull, cutting a gash from which the red blood flowed out all over the golden hair.

"Aha, gay fellow! hast felt the touch of Scathelock?" cried the other, exultingly, as he drew back to repeat his blow. "Now, by'r Lady, thou shalt have more ere thou'st done."

But he had better have left his boast unsaid.

Hitherto Green Jacket had been fighting silently and coolly, with a smile on his face, not attacking with any vehemence, but defending himself stoutly. However, as soon as the first stunning sensation of his enemy's blow was over his color returned, and a fierce look overspread his face as he ground his teeth.

"Now by the head of Harold," he cried, angrily, "I'll show thee that thou hast to deal with thy master, malapert knave."

As he spoke, he ran at the other, and seizing his staff by the end plied him with blow on blow, which it took all the dexterity of the stranger to avoid. Then, closing in on him to half-staff distance, he suddenly lifted his weapon as if to strike, but instead of that thrust vehemently with both hands, driving the end of the heavy staff into the breast of his enemy, and sending him staggering back, gasping for breath.

"How now, malapert knave?" he cried, swinging up his staff with both hands once more.

Then, with a great effort, he dealt Master Scathelock such a knock on the side of the head that the aggressive young man fell at length on the grass and rolled over till he lay still and senseless.

Then the golden-haired youth looked down at his late opponent, somewhat regretfully.

"Fore heaven, 'tis a proper fellow and a bold one," he said, musingly. "I count myself no craven, but he hath given me enough work. Marry, had I a hundred such we could hold these old woods against all the power of this prince and his covetous barons, who rob us English to give to their Norman Frenchmen."

Without more ado the youth cast aside his staff, knelt down by the senseless one and busied himself in reviving him.

He had not long to work. Master Scathelock, as he had called himself, was evidently of a hardy stock, and minded not a cracked crown, more or less; for he presently opened his eyes, put his hand to his head and sat up, looking dazed and stupid.

His late foe rose, resumed his staff, and watched the other in silence. Presently the stranger looked at him and smiled ruefully.

"Gay fellow, thou art best man," he observed. "I came to shear and go back shorn. Thou play'st a pretty staff."

"What brought thee hither?" asked the other, suddenly. "What is thy name? Thy face seemeth as I knew it or some like it."

"Marry, sir, my name is Will Scarlet, that men call Scathelock for the same crack on the nob I gave thee," said the man in red, rubbing his head softly. "But, fore heaven, an I cannot guard my own head better I were best give up the name."

"But what brought thee hither, Master Scathelock?" again asked the youth in green velvet.

"Marry, sir, to see Robin Fitzooth, Earl of Huntington, that they call the poor man's friend," returned Scathelock, still rubbing his head softly. "They tell me he is a proper man of his hands, and I would try a bout with him at quarter-staff. But 'tis all over now I have met thee. I seek no Earl of Huntington, for I have my bellyful."

"And 'tis Fitzooth has given it thee," said the other with a smile. "Thou needst go no further, for I am Robin, Earl of Huntington."

Will Scarlet rose to his feet and made a low bow to his late conqueror.

"I am thy servant then, my lord," he said; "for I swore ere I left home that if thou wert more than my match, I would be thy man forever."

"Be it so," replied the earl, with his cordial smile. "'Tis an old English custom to fight till we have our bellyful, and then to love one another all the better for the good fight."

"And if my lord take it not amiss," said Will Scarlet, respectfully, "I would give him a piece of counsel. There are men lying in wait for thee on the road hard by, for I met them and heard them talk on't. My lord will do well to keep from Nottingham to-day."

"Nay, not so, Scathelock," replied Huntington with a proud smile. "I never flinched from face of man yet, nor will I now. What harm can men do me?"

"Much," said Will Scarlet, impressively, "when the prince hath passed a decree of outlawry on thy head."

The young earl started back in dismay, bold as he was, for there was something in those times in the penalties of outlawry enough to appal the bravest.

To be an outlaw was to have the hand of every man, woman and child against one, to be a hunted fugitive whom it were meritorious for any to kill while escaping, and whose only haven of refuge was the Fleet Prison for Debtors. To be an outlaw, was to suffer any and every penalty, including death, for the one crime of owing money and being unable to pay it.

"Why outlawed?—at whose suit?—for what?" he asked incredulously.

"Nay, that I know not," said Will Scarlet;

"but this I know, that a party of men are waiting at the edge of the forest, and that when I asked them whom they waited for, they said for the outlawed Earl of Huntington, to take him, dead or alive."

The young earl stood for a moment buried in thought, and then turned to Scathelock.

"Good fellow," he said, "we have fought together, and thou art the best man of thy hands I ever met. Wilt go with me and stand by me in this fight?"

"Fight!" echoed Scathelock, in a tone of amazement. "Why, my lord, they be fifteen men in steel caps, and carrying swords and staves."

"So much the worse for them," answered the earl, sternly; and a new look came on his face such as had never appeared there before. "If they will outlaw me, I will see that they have some reason for't. Wilt come?"

Scathelock stared a moment longer, and then replied, briskly and cheerfully:

"Nay, an ye will throw away your life, my lord, ye shall never say Will Scathelock turned his back at the pinch of time. Have with ye, my lord."

The earl said not a word, but turned away. The clotted blood was still in the midst of his bright yellow curls, and had nearly dried there, while a dark frown was on his brow. He looked like a sad and desperate man, very different from the "gay fellow" with whom Scathelock had picked a quarrel.

CHAPTER II.

THE ABBOT.

In a lofty room in Fountain Abbey sat Gilbert, the Abbot, with his sandaled feet crossed on a carved stool, while he lay back in his huge oaken chair and listened to the speech of a man dressed in black, who frequently bowed low before him.

The abbot was stout and comfortable in appearance, with a round, rosy face, closely shaven, and a scrupulously correct tansure. His dress was that of his order of begging friars, and the cord around his waist was of the proper thickness for penitential scourgings.

Nevertheless, the appearance of the room in which he sat showed that he was no austere monk. It was furnished with a luxury very rare in those early days, and boasted of five or six mighty arm-chairs of carved oak, fanciful, but as strong as could be made, with a broad, roomy settee in front of the huge fireplace.

Although it was Mayday, the thick stone walls of Fountain Abbey, oozing with the damps of more than fifty winters, made the atmosphere within so chilly that a fire became exceedingly grateful to the abbot's bare feet, only protected by the thongs of his sandals. The blaze of three or four huge logs lighted up the carved oaken beams of the ceiling, and glanced on a magnificent silver crucifix and the candlesticks of a little shrine at one side of the room.

The stone flags of the floor were covered in more than one place by rich-hued Persian or Turkish rugs, the spoils of some crusading relatives of the abbot, and a fretted glass flagon of wine on the table beside a great silver cup, showed that the gentleman had friends in Venice, the only place where such glass was then made.

Just at the moment when we see him, the Abbot of Fountain Abbey was not occupied with wine, but with a big parchment, which lay across his knees, as he sat before the fire. This document the man in black was explaining to him, to all appearance. It was covered with figures and calculations, and seemed to be very interesting to both, from the expression of their faces.

"And it seemeth, Master Roger Warman," said the abbot, slowly, "that the Earl of Huntington oweth to me, his uncle, a thousand marks, all spent in riotous living, and secured on his estates."

"Fair sir, it is true," replied Roger Warman, with a bow. "The suits and executions are all ready, and if your lordship wishes, the earl can be driven from his estates to-morrow, and taken to prison till he pay all that he oweth."

"That may not be," said the abbot, thoughtfully. "They say the people love him hereabouts, and would kill the king's officers, did they come to take him."

"Then should he be outlawed," said Roger Warman. "It will be easy enough, for Prince John and Queen Eleanor are in these parts, and we can get the decree from the Chancellor, even now, if we wish."

Abbot Gilbert turned his eyes to meet those of the steward, and smiled slightly.

"Thou'rt a keen knave, after all, Roger," he

remain. "But hast thou any way to set the Prince against my nephew Robin? Remember that the king was his godfather, and that the Earl of Huntington and young John were playmates once."

Roger Warman smiled in turn, a foxy, almost wolfish grin, suggestive of licking the chaps over a fat lamb about to be devoured. He looked foxy at the best of times, this steward of the Earldom of Huntington, with his red hair and sharp nose, his twinkling eyes and cunning expression. His make, long, lean and muscular, was also like that of a fox, and had he been a soldier, he might have made a good one. As it was, his avarice led him, in a day when the profession of arms was the only one called honorable, to become a lawyer and bury his nose in rent-rolls and bills of charges to fill his own pockets.

"The way to set the two at odds is not long a-finding," he observed to the abbot. "The Earl hath long loved the Lady Marian, Lord Fitz Walter's daughter, and the prince hath cast an eye of favor the same way. They will both meet to-day, and the lady with them, so 'twill be strange if we cannot put strife between them."

The abbot nodded his head slowly, and turned again to look at the parchment.

"A thousand marks—four thousand pounds," he muttered. "We never lent him that much, Roger."

"Holy abbot," said the steward, in smooth, oily tones, "it is not good that we should take the funds of the church and lend them to an ungodly reprobate, such as Robin, Earl of Huntington, without requiring interest for the use of the same, and further interest again when that is unpaid. The treasury of Fountain Abbey was always open to him when I came to borrow for his needs, and it is meet that Fountain Abbey should possess his lands now that he hath wasted his substance in riotous living."

Again the abbot nodded his head slowly and stretched out his feet to a more comfortable position before the fire. He was content to accept the steward's arguments without any question. He had been guardian to his nephew, Robin Fitzooth, Earl of Huntington, since the infancy of the boy; and in all that time the earl had been living, unknown to himself, on money lent by his guardian, instead of the dues of his retainers. The consequences were double; the retainers, living free for so long, adored the young earl who had released them from taxes, as they thought; but the estates of Huntington melted away day by day, as the careless boy, ignorant of writing, made his mark to deed after deed at his uncle's bidding, till the time had arrived at last when Robin Fitzooth, at his majority, was an earl without an earldom: an expert in every exercise of the military art, but guiltless of letters; a huntsman of the best, and the strongest youth in Nottinghamshire, but owning not a rood of land he could call his own under the law.

"It is well that the prodigal should be punished, Master Warman," the abbot observed, in a satisfied tone. "The Abbot of Fountain Abbey can take better care of these broad lands than the madcap archer that ranges Sherwood like a clown afoot, instead of wielding the lance in tourney, as a knight should."

"'Tis the blood of the Lady Roisia that makes him love the churl's porridge rather than the knight's pastry," said Warman, sententiously. "The Saxons are still thick in this country, and the earl loves it to be said that he is one of them. He wears his hair long, as they have the custom among their nobles, and goes afoot where other nobles ride."

"The blood of Roisia—Waltheof of Northumberland's daughter—a Saxon to the backbone," muttered the abbot; and the color rose to his cheeks, for he also was of Saxon blood, and strove to hide it on all occasions.

Warman, who was of Norman-French birth, noted the change in his patron's countenance, and smiled to himself as he covered the abbot with unctuous flattery.

"Not that I say anything against Saxon blood," he pursued, "when it is not made plain to all the world that a man is proud of belonging to the English race. They were beaten at Hastings, and any man who is proud of them can consort with them for all me. But it boots not to talk of him now, for an ye wish he will be no earl by to-morrow's dawn."

"Canst thou do it for me, Roger?" asked the prior, in a tone of desire, mingled with caution.

"Ay, well can I, my lord abbot, said the steward, with a low bow. "I lack but one thing."

"And what is that?" asked the abbot, uneasily,

for there was something in the other's tone that sounded a little strange.

"My payment," said the steward, quietly. "And how much lackest thou?" asked the abbot, with his eyes still fixed on the burning logs as if in a fit of absence of mind.

"I lack the spurs of knighthood and an estate," replied Warman, boldly. "My fathers were good men and true at Hastings, but they went afoot. I have given into your hands the broad lands of Huntington and Barnesdale; I need the manor of Tring and to be knighted, that the prince may make me High Sheriff of Nottingham. If your reverence and grace will not do this for me, I can go to the earl and tell him how he hath been wronged by me and others, and then he will go to the justicers and get his lands once more."

"Enough, Warman, enough," said the abbot, lifting his hand to check the other's volubility. "Thou shalt be a knight an I can compass it, and sheriff thereafter."

"I know I can depend on my noble patron," said the steward, bowing low and obsequiously. "My lord shall have his desire to-morrow, for I will have the writs made out to sign by the prince to-day. Were I your lordship, I would go to visit the Lord Fitz Walter. It may be well to show the baron that his interests are dear to the church. Besides, the prince will be there, and 'tis more than like that our galliard Huntington will be there, too. Who knows what may happen?"

The abbot shifted uneasily in his seat. "Thou'rt right, Warman, thou'rt right," he said. "Call brother Ignatius and tell him to saddle the mules, and we will go at once. This boy may get the ear of his grace else; and then all our pains are in vain."

Roger Warman took up a small bell on the table and rung it sharply, when it was answered by a lay brother, who came humbly in to see his superior.

"Go bid the mules be prepared, brother," said the abbot, in the cold, stately manner he always practiced toward his inferiors in rank. "Let Father Ambrose, the cellarer, come with me, and two sumpter-mules with apparel, for we shall be gone several days."

Brother Ignatius bowed low in silence and left the room, when the abbot turned again to considering the figures of the parchment which he held, which was nothing more than the account of the Huntington estate, showing it to be in debt to Fountain Abbey for a thousand marks.

The two worthies seemed never to be tired of comparing notes over this document, and began forthwith to concoct measures how to extort money from the retainers as soon as they should be in legal possession of the estates.

While they discussed this, the wine in the flagon began to diminish, for the abbot could be liberal on occasion, and by the time Father Ambrose, the fat cellarer, came waddling into the room behind his protuberant stomach, the bottle needed to be replenished.

Then Father Ambrose disturbed them both as he came in by his exclamation:

"Now, by St. Charles of Tours, thou shouldst look from the window, brother Gilbert, this morning, to see the brave show go by. Yonder is the Prince John and the Bishop of Ely himself, passing."

Abbot Gilbert jumped up with unwonted agility and ran to the window. As he did so, the clear, ringing notes of a hunting-horn sounded from the meadows of Fountain Abbey, and he looked down. There was the embroidered banner of the Lord Chancellor Bishop of Ely, side by side with the three leopards *passant* of the house of Plantagenet. Abbot Gilbert saw that his opportunity had arrived.

CHAPTER III.

THE FORESTERS.

Two days after Prince John rode past Fountain Abbey and on the same day when Scathe-lock fought with the young earl, a party of fifteen men lay on the grass by the edge of Sherwood Forest, where the Nottingham road runs through. They talked together loudly and carelessly, and swigged brandywein from their leathern flasks. They wore steel morions on their heads and steel gorgets to protect neck and shoulders, but they were otherwise unprovided with defensive armor save a quilted green tunic, that might turn the cut of a sword. For weapons, each man wore a broadsword at his side, and carried a quarter-staff in his hand. By those familiar with the marks in medieval attire these men would be recognized as the servitors of some great lord, and the three leopards of

gold worked on their breasts were the bearings of the house of Plantagenet.

As they sat there, carousing, and evidently waiting for some one, the quick tramp of a trotting horse was heard, and Roger Warman, the traitor steward of the Earl of Huntington, rode into the midst of them. A great change had come over his appearance, for he no longer wore the black garments of a notary. Instead, he was equipped in full armor of the time, mail-shirt, helmet, cuirass and gauntlets, while his sword clattered against the stirrup of the war-horse he rode, and his gold spurs proclaimed that he had attained the honor of knighthood, as he had, for it was as Sir Roger Warman, Sheriff of Nottingham, that he was now saluted by the men.

"Stand to your arms," he cried, as he rode through. "Your man is coming; and remember that if ye can pick a quarrel with him 'tis better than to take him alive. The prince needs him not. Be ready."

Then the sheriff rode away toward Nottingham, looking as gallant as an honest knight in his new armor, and mounted on the red roan steed which was part of his plunder of the Huntington estates.

The foresters, in their green coats, disposed themselves as if carelessly feasting, but each had his great quarter-staff near him, as two men came out of the greenwood and sauntered carelessly toward them. They were the Earl of Huntington and Will Scarlet, surnamed "Scathe-lock." Both carried their bows in their hands, ready strung. That of the earl, in particular, was of such unusual size and thickness as to attract attention, for it seemed to be an impossibility that a man of anything but superhuman strength should be able to bend it.

None of the foresters made any motion till the two new-comers were in their midst, when one of them rose, and pointing to the earl, said, jeeringly:

"Here's a fool fellow, that carries a bow he cannot bend. Best give it me, fool fellow."

"Nay," answered the earl, with a grim smile, "this is but a light thing I use for a birding-bow. I have another at home that is stronger."

The foresters all laughed in a chorus of derision, and three more of them arose and began to swagger toward Huntington and Scathe-lock, twirling their quarter-staves over their fingers in a manner that boded ill for the preservation of peace.

"Nay, then," said the earl, coolly, "I'll wager a rose noble I can hit a hart at five hundred yards."

"To the fiend with thy rose nobles! Thou'rt not so much as a silver groat in thy purse," replied one of the men, with a coarse chuckle.

"Nay, then, thou liest," said the earl, as coolly as before. "See here, sirrah."

And he drew from the pouch at his girdle a handful of gold coin and jingled it before the eyes of the crowd.

Instantly every forester was on his feet, and crowding round the earl and Scathe-lock with menacing looks. The chief among them made a grasp for the money, and the next moment the quarrel they had been provoking began.

With singular rapidity and dexterity the Earl of Huntington began to throw the heavy gold coins, held between a thumb and finger, right into the faces of the astonished ruffians. Each coin struck edgewise with tremendous force, entirely unexpected, and each dropped a man, half-stunned to the ground. Then, in the midst of the confusion, Robin Fitzooth ran out of the press with great swiftness, Scathe-lock closely following, and turned when safe out of the reach of a sudden assault.

All the men were picking themselves up, and began to run toward him, when Huntington bent that mighty bow which had been the cause of all the disturbance.

"Hold thy hand, Scathe-lock," he said, sternly, as the youth beside him was following his example. "This quarrel is none of thine. Leave it to me."

Will Scarlet obeyed in silence, and then the earl drew an arrow to the head and loosed that grand bow.

TWANG!!!

It sounded like the cord of a bass-viol as the string flew back, and the sharp whistle of the arrow was followed by a thud and a yell of mortal agony, as the foremost ruffian threw up his arms and fell back in the forest glade, dead, the gray feather of the earl's arrow dripping with his blood.

Hardly had the first arrow sped, when a second was on the string, and a second man fell transfixed, so that the rest halted in terror and amazement. The tall earl stood with his quiver

on the ground at his feet, and two arrows in his left hand beside the bow, while he fitted a third arrow to the string.

"*Twang!*" went the great bow again, and another man fell, when the rest made a desperate rush for the nearest trees, throwing themselves open to the terrible arrows of the enemy they had so rashly provoked. Before they could reach cover two more had fallen, and then the earl turned to Scathe-lock.

"Go thou and turn them out, but shoot not, I charge thee."

Scathe-lock nodded and laughed, and ran off to the right, drawing his bow as he went. Very soon he lifted his weapon to threaten one of the foresters, and immediately the man broke cover and ran out, only to be transfixed by another arrow from the watchful and inexorable earl.

Again and again was this maneuver repeated, the poor wretches bellowing for mercy from behind their trees, but darting out to escape as soon as threatened, till the terrible earl had laid fourteen of his assailants on the sod, with little or no danger to himself. Then the last man turned to flee, and ran like a deer down the highway toward Nottingham, just as Sir Roger Warman, full of impatience, came trotting back to see what had happened. The sheriff and his knave met face to face, just as the earl sent the last arrow in his quiver into the back of the last of his assailants, stretching him in death on the road.

Then the new sheriff of Nottingham turned pale, as he looked down the road and saw all the dead bodies lying there. He checked his horse, and was pulling on the rein to turn him, when Scathe-lock leaped out of the bushes, with arrow on the string, and called out to him:

"Hold, master sheriff, the Earl of Huntington needs thee."

But Sir Roger Warman could not stand the idea of facing the master he had betrayed. He dug his spurs into his charger, wrenched round its head, and made for Nottingham as fast as he could go.

Not fast enough, however, to escape the arrow of Will Scarlet, who forgot his chief's order in his eagerness to stop the flying sheriff.

"*Twang!*" went the bow, and the red roan charger fell forward on knees and crown, and rolled over stone dead, the sheriff pitching on his head.

When he recovered his senses he looked up, and beheld his dreaded master coming toward him, quarter-staff in hand, while Scathe-lock looked on from the roadside with perfect unconcern.

Sir Roger Warman scrambled to his feet in a desperate hurry and turned toward Nottingham. A moment's reflection, however, convinced him that it was useless to flee; for his heavy armor would prevent him making any great speed, while he knew that the earl could run like a deer.

Therefore he took heart of grace, for he was not a coward, even if he was a scamp of the first water. He awaited the earl and drew his sword to meet him, while he flung his small triangular steel shield to the front.

Then up came Huntington to meet his late steward, and recognized him in an instant.

"Roger Warman, what dost thou here?" he asked, in a stern voice.

"I am sent by the orders of the prince to take thee, dead or alive!" answered the new sheriff, boldly. "Lay down thine arms and surrender, for thou art outlawed at the suit of Bishop Gilbert of Hereford, late Abbot of Fountain Abbey."

"For what sum?" demanded the earl, in the same tone.

"For a thousand marks, lent thee by the monks of the Abbey," replied the sheriff.

"Take the quittance, then," retorted the outlawed noble, with a grim smile, and forthwith he advanced on the sheriff.

It seemed as if the contest was all to be in favor of the man in armor, whose sword and shield were confronted by nothing but a quarter-staff, but it quickly appeared that the odds were on the other side. Huntington, before he began his fight, threw his bow, quiver, sword and buckler to the ground, and then leaped forward, light and unincumbered, to the assault, whirling his long staff round his head.

Whack! whack! crack! went the great quarter-staff, and the sheriff caught the blows on his steel shield and sword every time. But they came with such tremendous force that they seemed to numb his arms, and he could make no assault in reply.

The earl leaped round his antagonist, whirling the huge staff about his head, and threatening the man in armor, now on one side, now the

other. The fourth blow caught the sheriff on the right leg below the knee, and elicited a groan in spite of the mail hose that protected the limb.

"Aha! Dost thou feel the first of the thousand marks, foul traitor?" hissed the earl savagely, as he gave a leap to one side, and fetched the other a second blow on the wrist of his sword-arm that sent his weapon flying.

Roger Warman uttered a howl of agony and turned to flee, when the other ran after him, plying him with blow on blow, his armor resounding to the strokes of the great staff, the sheriff roaring for mercy but receiving none, till at last he fell prone on his face in the hard road, and lay motionless as if dead.

Then Huntington desisted from striking and turned over the prostrate sheriff with his foot.

"This will do for to-day," he said, sternly, to the fallen man. "Take thy life without the asking, but beware of the next time thou comest to take me. Go to thy masters, prince or bishop, which thou wilt, and tell them that Robin Fitzooth will make them pay many a thousand marks ere he be done, for this outlawry. They may think that they have the kingdom safe, because the good King Richard is at the wars; but mark me well, Roger Warman, *he will come back*—and then—beware!"

So saying, he turned away to his weapons and slowly resumed them; while Scathe-lock, who already seemed to have constituted himself his attendant, went round to the dead bodies as they lay, stark and stiff, and coolly pulled the arrows from them where it was possible so to do.

Then the two men, the outlaw and the willing associate of all his perils, turned toward the great forest of Sherwood and were quickly buried in its recesses. They knew that from henceforth, every man's hand would be against them throughout all England, and yet they seemed to be nowise cast down, as they disappeared under the green arches of the oak wood.

Meanwhile the unlucky sheriff, stiff and sore after the terrible drubbing he had received, spite of his armor, slowly rose to his feet and hobbled off to Nottingham.

Late that afternoon, a mournful procession visited the scene of the conflict, and decently removed the bodies of the slain, who were taken to Nottingham and buried in a common grave.*

And thus commenced the outlawry of Robin Fitzooth, Earl of Huntington.

CHAPTER IV. THE TOURNAMENT.

LOXLEY CASTLE was all alive with merriment on the next day, for the prince, confident that he had forever got rid of the Earl of Huntington, and desirous to please the Lady Marian, daughter of Lord Fitz Walter, owner of the castle in which he was now a guest, had proclaimed a grand joust or tournament, with games for the common people, where the lady herself was to enact the part of "Queen of Love and Beauty," or princess of the festival.

The drawbridge had been lying down across the moat all day long, while the portcullis was wide open, and the warden of the gate dozed at his post, unmindful of the throngs passing in and out of the great court-yard.

The villagers of Loxley, dressed in their best and bearing their bows and arrows, were crowding toward the butts, which had been set up on the meadows by the Trent, outside of the lists proper, where the tournament was to take place. The inclosure for the knights to engage was about two hundred yards in length by as many in breadth, and surrounded by gently-rising ground, which afforded a perfect view for all the spectators. Besides the men of Loxley, there were crowds from the neighboring villages, most of them from the broad lands once belonging to the outlawed earl, whose fate was the topic of general conversation among the populace, as they crowded round the lists.

"An outlawed earl is no better than an outlawed churl," quoth a yeoman of gigantic stature, who stood leaning on his unstrung bow, amid a group of friends, before the butts. "I mind when all the folk blessed the Earl of Hunt-

*The graves of the fifteen foresters said in the old legend to have been killed by Robin Hood were no fiction. They were discovered in 1796, when digging the cellar for a new house in the vicinity of the town of Nottingham, and the skeletons were disposed in the order in which the old ballad places them "all in a row." This fact, recorded in the *Gentleman's Magazine* at the end of the last century, confirms the actual existence of the celebrated outlaw, and one of his most remarkable deeds.

ington, and now none have word to say for the poor man's friend."

"Ay, and for good cause," responded a stout fellow, with shoulders of uncommon breadth, whose floury coat bespoke him a miller. "Thou know'st, John Nailor, that without a groat in his purse King Richard would be no king; and the earl hath spent all his money. Let him lie on the earth like the rest of us, now."

"Nay, by St. Dunstan," observed a third; "an I could help the good earl with a clothyard shaft in the breast of his foes, my name's not Clym o' the Clough but I'd stand outlawry with him. But what's the use? The Normans have the land and the English may go hang for all them. Let us drink the prince's ale, and cry Hey! for Plantagenet. He's given us brave prizes for the shooting."

At this moment the loud blasts of the trumpets told that the lists were being opened.

"Come, Miller," said Clym o' the Clough, throwing his bow over his shoulder; "and thou, too, Little John. There'll be no shooting here till the great lords be through with their lance-play, and we may as well see what can be seen."

"They say there's to be a brave show of knights," responded the yeoman called "Little John" (in sarcastic allusion to his great height.) "Let them ride and poke with their fine lances. I know a bow can send its shaft plumb through the best armor of the whole of them."

The miller laughed at the tall fellow, as he retorted:

"Keep thy brags till they're needed, Little John. Thou'lt have a chance to shoot ere this day's out, or I am Much the Liar instead of Much the Miller."

The friends proceeded to the lists and elbowed their way to the front of the assembly among the townsmen of Nottingham with comparative ease, they being all stout, lusty fellows, and evidently prompt to quarrel. Thus it resulted that when the great gate at the end of the lists flew open, and Prince John rode in with his train to begin the tournament, the front seats all round the list were occupied by lusty bowmen from the country-side, who carried their weapons with them, and waited for the shooting after the joust.

Prince John was followed by a train of knights, French and Norman, splendidly armed, *cap-à-pie*, and mounted on huge war-horses of the Norman or Flanders breed, heavy brutes that sustained the weight of their mail-clad riders with ease, but were incapable of any great exhibition of speed.

The knights were divided into two parties, wearing scarfs of red and blue respectively, and both circled around the lists in opposite directions, passing below the canopy which shaded the Lady Marian and her attendants, and making low obeisances, to which the lady responded by a gracious inclination of the head.

Marian Fitz Walter on this occasion looked as beautiful as it was possible to imagine any woman on earth, and the fact of her beauty being of the bright blonde order made her conspicuous among the darker French ladies who surrounded her. Her tresses of pale gold were half concealed by a veil of silver tissue, and she was entirely robed in white and gold, so that her figure shone like a star from afar. But all the softness and beauty of her dress did not savor of insipidity when you looked at her sparkling mobile face, with its saucy little nose, rosebud mouth and blue eyes full of fire and spirit. The dress was that of a gracious and gentle queen, while the face was that of a saucy, willful little gipsy.

As the Prince lowered his lance in salutation before her, Lady Marian bent her head with a mocking smile, and spoke under her breath to her maid who sat behind her.

"A gallant knight, truly, Joan, to court a distressed lady when her champion is away, and yet be mute as a mouse when he is near. Let us see what he will do at the joust."

Then, as the other leader, Sir Humphrey de Clifford, saluted, she bowed again and whispered:

"Tis another gallant, Joan, who would rather ride with a blunted lance in a tourney, than follow the good king Richard to slay the Saracens before Jerusalem. Out on them both, and let the Norman hawks peck each other's eyes for all me."

She spoke in the old Anglo-Saxon or English tongue, which was then avoided by the haughty Norman conquerors of England, who affected to despise it, and her language showed that she held rather with the race of her mother, who had been a Saxon heiress, than with her Norman father in her sentiments.

But now the heralds sounded their trumpets thrice, and the two parties of knights withdrew to the opposite ends of the lists, while the marshal shouted with a loud voice:

"Fight well, gallant knights, for ladies' eyes behold your deeds! Let them go!"

Then the trumpets sounded once more, and the red and blue parties of knights galloped to meet each other, coming together in a cloud of dust, with a loud clang of weapons, in the middle of the field.

Then was there brave splintering of lances in the lists of Loxley. Prince John overthrew his opponent Clifford, but several of his own party were unhorsed, and a wild, confused *mêlée*, resembling an actual battle, raged in the midst of the inclosure for some minutes. The yeomen round the lists stood up and shouted, while all the people joined in the acclamations, as the fight swayed to and fro, till the Prince's party, composed of the best knights, forced the others back to the edge of the lists, and the marshal rode in and sounded his trumpet, declaring with a loud voice that the victory belonged to "Prince John of Normandy and Aquitaine, Lord Regent of England."

Again the people cheered, but faintly, for the prince was no favorite; and Much the Miller observed:

"By my faith 'twas no joust at all, but a mere juggler's play. The prince is a poor lance at best, but yon Clifford is a time-serving caitiff, that lets himself be beaten."

He spoke loud enough to be heard by all, and right before him sat one of the marshals of the lists, who turned angrily round, raising his lance in air.

"How now, malapert knave!" he cried, wheeling his horse to run at the yeoman; "wouldst revile the Lord Regent?"

Had Much the Miller been alone that day he might have fared ill; but as it was, his fellows, prompt to resent any insult from a Norman lord, if they could with safety, and confiding in their numbers, jumped up with one accord, and began to bend their great bows. The marshal shook his lance in the air and scolded vigorously, but evidently did not care to provoke closer acquaintance with those long arrows, for he did not attempt to spear the miller; and the latter did not see fit to make any further remarks.

Then, just as the sudden disturbance was passing into quietude, a loud bugle-blast rent the air outside the lists, and into the field rode a tall knight on a mighty dapple-gray steed, followed by a squire on a black horse, and preceded by a herald.

All three of the party wore green surcoats, and the knight's armor was of plain blue steel, while he bore a silver moon and stars in the middle of his shield, with the motto "I fly by night."

A hush of expectation succeeded the buzz of excitement which had attended the sudden and inglorious close of the tourney. Then Little John shouted exultantly:

"Now shall we have a *real* joust, merry men! Yon champion will not be denied."

In another moment the green herald sounded his trumpet, and shouted with a loud voice:

"Here stands the good knight, Sir Robin o' the Hood, defying all here to battle, one after the other."

"Sir Robin o' the Hood! who be that?" growled Clym o' the Clough. "Well, the fiend take the luck, I care not, so he fight well."

The surcoat of the strange knight, made of green velvet and bordered with ermine, was ornamented with a hood that fell down its wearer's back and gave him his name for the nonce, default of a better, for his face was concealed by the visor of his helmet.

The sound of this bold defiance was succeeded by a hush of expectation, for the people knew that in the custom of the day the challenge could not be declined. Then Prince John's herald rode out to reply and announced that his master would accept the challenge, when he had rested and taken a fresh horse and lance.

The green stranger bowed his head and rode off to the other extremity of the lists, passing as he did so under the throne of the Queen of Love and Beauty.

He made a dead halt here, and lowered his lance to the earth in salutation, when Marian, whose color had been rising ever since his first appearance in the lists, rose suddenly and impetuously to her feet, and cast her bouquet of flowers to the strange knight, a gift which Sir Robin o' the Hood caught with distinguished grace, and acknowledged by a still deeper salutation.

The ladies' gallery was all in a flutter of ex-

citement instantly at this unprecedented act of the Lady Marian.

"Marry, is the girl mad?" indignantly exclaimed the Dowager Lady Fitz Walter, her aunt, as she turned her angry face on her imprudent relative. "Know ye not that the crown is only given to the victor, after the battle is over?"

"'Tis over already, fair aunt," returned Marian, saucily. "I will be no fighting after this, for yonder knight of the green hood will stretch these puny gallants on the plain like corn in a storm."

"Fie on thee, minion, to say it," retorted the old lady. "How know'st thou yon knight with his visor down? This is not maidenly."

"Said I that I knew him?" asked Marian, mockingly. "It needs no skill in arms to know that yonder is the prettiest man in the lists. Look at his shoulders and the way he clasps his horse. He will win, of a surety."

While this angry colloquy disturbed the ladies' gallery, Sir Robin o' the Hood tranquilly pursued his way to the end of the lists, and wheeling his horse, sat like a statue, lance erect, watching for Prince John.

The Lord Regent did not seem anxious to begin the fray, though for the honor of his knight-hood he could not decline the contest. He drank off three cups of wine to raise his courage, chose a fresh horse and looked to every part of its harness himself, with the most assiduous care, before he could be induced to take a lance and mount.

Then at last he was ready, and the trumpets sounded for the onset.

Sir Robin o' the Hood came on like a thunder-bolt, his dapple gray steed leaping as if it meant to throw its rider in its tremendous energy. He met the prince in full career and caught him full in the midst of the shield before the wavering lance of the Lord Regent had touched him, hurling John from his saddle over his horse's tail, and sending him rolling over and over in the dust, till he lay still and senseless.

Then arose a tremendous shout of joy from all the common people in the lists, in the midst of which a burly figure, dressed in the robes of a bishop, arose in the midst of the benches reserved for the nobility, and cried out:

"'Tis the outlawed Earl of Huntingdon, and he hath slain the prince! Up, my lords, and seize the traitor!"

Instantly everything was in commotion. The Norman lords, by no means displeased to have an opportunity to avenge the defeat of one of their own number, rose up and shouted to their retainers to "seize the outlaw."

The news spread like wildfire throughout the lists, and then came the counter-feeling for the earl, who sat on his horse in the middle of the lists, looking coolly round him, defiant of the clamor.

"Help the people's friend! Bows and bills! Bows and bills!" shouted Much the Miller, leaping into the lists, followed by his friends; and instantly the old English arming cry, "Bows and bills!" echoed from every quarter of the lists, as a hundred stout fellows came leaping down and ran to surround the people's idol.

"Plantagenet! Plantagenet! Down with the outlaw!" shouted the Norman retainers, brandishing swords but hesitating to advance.

"Robin Hood! Robin Hood!" shouted the yeomen in answer, and forthwith they sent a volley of long arrows flying at their enemies.

The battle of noble and peasant was begun.

CHAPTER V.

THE ESCAPE.

THE outlawed Earl of Huntingdon had earned the name which he ever after bears in English annals, for the cry of "Robin Hood" seemed to spread like wildfire, and the people roared it aloud as they advanced on the Norman nobles, the yeomen sending their long arrows whistling into the midst of the retainers, till the latter broke and fled in confusion, following their masters, scrambling over benches and palings to escape.

But this did not last long, for the yeomen, though all big lusty fellows, full of brawn and sinew, were only about a hundred strong, and the crowd of Norman retainers and sturdy townsmen of Nottingham was several thousand in number. Therefore, although they quickly cleared the benches of the nobles and the lists themselves of enemies, they could not prevent a huge crowd of armed men from gathering in their rear, till one or two crossbow bolts began to whistle among them, while the thundering of horse over the meadows announced that all the men-at-arms of the Prince's train and Loxley

Castle were coming up to avenge the sudden assault.

The outlawed earl, who had been directing the battle of his volunteer allies, turned his horse to meet the new danger, and observed:

"Merry men all, we must to the greenwood. Who will follow the outlaw Robin Hood and share his fate?"

"That will we all, master," shouted Little John, enthusiastically. "To the greenwood, the greenwood, the merry greenwood!"

The cry was echoed by all there, and forthwith the whole body of outlaws broke from the lists, led by Robin Hood on horseback, followed by his squire, who was none other than Scathe-lock, and by the unknown herald in green, a young man of slender figure who bore no weapons, but carried a lute at his back, proclaiming him a minstrel.

No sooner did the crowd observe their retreat than a great yell was set up, and the townsmen began to run in pursuit, making a tremendous noise, but taking care to keep out of bowshot. The men-at-arms, hardy, resolute mercenaries, confiding in their armor and led by several Norman knights, while the angry bishop of Hereford exhorted them from his mule to fight valiantly for the king and mother church, were not so timid. As soon as the outlaws were fairly in the broad meadows that lay between the Trent and the forest of Sherwood, the horsemen started after them on a trot.

The little body of yeomen ran on toward the woods, but would soon have been overtaken by the horsemen, had not a broad hedge and ditch offered them a means of refuge. Robin and his mounted followers scrambled through a gap in the hedge, but the yeomen halted on the further side and began to draw out their arrows as the men-at-arms came heedlessly on.

Presently the horsemen arrived at the unexpected obstacle and fell into confusion. Some halted in front of the ditch, others swerved away, while others again rode boldly in and tried to scramble through the gap. The same fate awaited all, for they were unable to cross anywhere, while the archers, perfectly secure from harm, plied them with arrows from their great bows, transfixing man and horse, the shafts going through common chain armor almost as if it had been paper. It was one of those occasions when the English archery of old times was shown at its best and perfectly triumphant, for all the obstinacy of the men-at-arms could not protect them from those terrible arrows; and, after a short essay of useless slaughter, they broke in dire confusion and fled, leaving the ditch full of bodies.

Thenceforth Robin Hood and his men were not molested in their retreat, and ere another hour had passed they were safe from pursuit in the depths of the forest of Sherwood.

Meanwhile, we must return to the lists, where Prince John had been lying senseless ever since his defeat by Robin Hood. The battle with the Norman retainers raged above his body. As the stout yeomen tramped over him, only the excellence of his cuirass of Milan steel saved him from being crushed to death like a common man. When the outlaws fled from the lists, John turned over groaning, and tried to rise, and was soon assisted to his feet by the obsequious townsmen who rushed to his help.

They carried him off the field when he was unarmed and taken to Loxley Castle. A few hours later, comfortable in body but thoroughly angry and mortified in mind, the prince lay on his couch and sent for the Bishop of Hereford and the Sheriff of Nottingham.

The portly bishop soon made his appearance in the prince's chamber, full of sympathy and condolence, but he was cut short at once by the exasperated prince who angrily exclaimed:

"So, my lord bishop, all the honors I have heaped on thee and Warman have not rid me of this outlawed caitiff. Where is the sheriff that was to have killed him? Where is he, I say?"

"Sir Roger Warman hath not returned, my great liege," answered the bishop, with a low reverence. "Please your grace, I feel confident that all these little trials are as nothing now. The caitiff earl hath fled to the forest, and henceforth we can hunt him as men hunt a wolf. He must be taken."

"He shall be taken, if it cost half the kingdom," said John, with a savage grinding of his teeth. "Fore Mary! my lord bishop, had I known 'twere he, I would never have ventured the good body of Plantagenet against his outlawed carcass. He should have been seized then. Why did ye not denounce him sooner?"

"So please my liege, I could not be certain till

I saw him ride, for he hath a way of striking with the lance which no other man in England possesses. But comfort your grace, for the man hath near run his course, and your grace shall have the lady while he roams the woods in the cold alone."

John's eyes brightened and he looked round as if to be satisfied that they were alone, before he said:

"Art sure of her, bishop? Will her father give her up to me?"

The bishop smiled sardonically.

"The Baron Fitz Walter is poor and needs lands. If King Henry could buy Fair Rosamond of her father, the Earl of Clifford, methinks Prince John can buy this Marian of a petty baron like Fitz Walter."

The prince looked long and earnestly at him.

"But an she love this outlaw, as mesemeth she does, how shall I get her?"

"Nay, then, we must take her to another Woodstock, and hide her there," said the bishop, shrewdly. "Twill not be hard, my liege."

"Well, well, be it so," answered John, sinking back on his pillow, weariedly. "I would Warman were come, though. I would have him raise the county to hunt this traitor earl."

Even as he spoke, came a soft knock at the door, and the very man they were speaking of, pale and languid, dragged himself weariedly into the room and fell on his knees by the prince's couch. It was Sir Roger Warman, no longer in armor, but in the robe of a civic dignitary of the day, while his hobbling pace and painful movements told of the beating he had received.

"Well, Warman, thou hast failed," said the prince, in a tone of resignation. "I see it all and I knew it before thou camest; for the traitor hath been here this very day. By the head of my father, but that I thought thou hadst killed him I should have known him to-day. Come, out with thy tale. He gave thee the slip. Where are thy men?"

"My liege," stammered Warman, "we caught him fairly, and had he been a man would have killed him. But this is no man, but a limb of the foul fiend himself. My men set on him, fifteen in steel-caps, with sword, and staff, and he shot them all, one after the other, so they lay lead in a row by Sherwood Forest."

"And thyself! how with thee?" asked the prince slowly, rising on his elbow.

"A catiff that was with him shot my horse, and then the fiend-earl came at me himself with his staff. Your grace knows I am no coward, and I fought hard for my life, but he hath the strength of ten, and he near broke mine arm and leg, and did so belabor me that no spot have I on my body save under my cuirass and helmet, that is not black and blue."

And the unlucky sheriff groaned in spirit over his punishment and became silent.

Prince John lay ruminating for some minutes ere he replied. At last he roused up and spoke:

"Thou sayest well, he is a devil: but we will take him yet. Thou art the sheriff of Nottingham. Rouse thee and call out all thy posse. I swear that this outlaw shall swing from a gibbet over the gate of Loxley Castle, ere I be two weeks older. Rouse thee then, Sir Roger, and show thou art worthy of the spurs of knight-hood that I have given thee. Take a hundred—five hundred—nay a thousand men, if need be, but bring me the outlawed earl wherever he hides himself."

Sir Roger Warman rose slowly and painfully to his feet and bowed low. Then he turned and left the room.

CHAPTER VI. MY PRETTY PAGE.

THE Lady Marian Fitz Walter sat at her broidery frame, among her maids, that same evening, working at a silk banner by the light of a swinging silver lamp, when a pretty boy of fourteen, with long black ringlets, burst into the room with the eager salutation:

"Oh, lady cousin, have you heard the news? The men are all to go out to-morrow to scour the woods and take the Earl of Huntington, dead or alive."

Marian's face flushed slightly and then paled. "No, sir page, I had not heard of it. Who is going?"

Reginald Fitz Walter was her cousin and the page of Loxley Castle, petted by the ladies for his handsome face, and as full of mischief as any boy of his age could be. He tossed his black curls aside from his brow as he answered her:

"Prince John and the queen have proclaimed the hue and cry after him, and Sir Roger Warman, the new sheriff of Nottingham, has raised the whole county-side for to-morrow. Marry,

our old friend Robin will have hot work to escape."

"'Tis a foul shame that the poor young earl should be so harried," observed Cicely, one of the maids. "What has he done that the prince should hate him?"

"He has beaten him at every point, that is all," answered Marian, in a tone of bitter sarcasm. "Let them hunt as long as they will. Robin Fitzooth, Earl of Huntington, will give them all the work they want, or I mistake me much, girls. Come, we are working too late into the night. Put away the frames. I am tired."

She spoke in a tone of unusual pettishness, she who was noted for her sweet and sunny temper, and the bower maidens started up in some trepidation to obey her, for the Lady Marian was understood to have a will of her own, when she chose to exercise it.

The girls hastened to carry off the embroidery frames, and while they were thus busied Reginald the page found time to approach the young lady and hand her a small white note, unseen by the rest.

Marian started, flushed crimson and hastily hid the note without looking at it, after which she affected to be tired and sleepy and hurried her attendants away from the room. As they went, she said in a low voice to Reginald:

"Go to the top of the keep. It is moonlight and we can talk there undisturbed."

The boy nodded with a look of sly intelligence and ran away with a laugh on his lip.

"Now, by my halidome," he said to himself, as he traversed the corridors of the castle on his way to the rendezvous, "our fair cousin is like all the rest of the ladies. The old love pales when the prince's love appears. The Lady Marian will be a second Rosamond and I shall be a belted knight before my time."

He was a wild, harum-scarum boy of little principle, and had readily yielded to the bribe offered by Prince John, whose letter he had just delivered to Marian. He little thought for what she had mistaken it.

Reginald traversed the long gallery that joined the living apartments of the castle to the great square "keep" or citadel on whose roof he was to meet his cousin. This keep was a feature of all medieval castles, a huge tower, generally square and made of masonry some thirty or forty feet thick in many cases, the apartments being used solely as stores for arms and refuges for the remnant of the garrison, in case of a successful assault by an enemy on the other portions of the castle. Right through the center of this huge mass of stone ran a narrow spiral staircase, leading up to the flat roof surrounded by battlements, on which the page and the lady were to meet. Reginald reached the summit and found that the full moon flooded the landscape with a luminous haze under which hill and dale were transfigured into a blaze of glory. He paced the summit for some minutes, during which everything below him seemed still as death, and the boy somehow began to feel ashamed of himself under the pure air of heaven.

"Poor Robin!" he murmured, to himself; "I fear me the prince has treated thee scurvily, and that I have done wrong to take letters to Marian from thine enemy. But it is too late to turn back now. The prince will be king very soon, and he can do aught he will to a good friend. It will sound well to be called Sir Reginald Fitz Walter at fifteen. But how if—"

He was interrupted by a white apparition coming to meet him by the battlements. It was his cousin Marian, her face as pale as her robes, and her great blue eyes shining with a strange angry luster, as she looked at the page. Reginald began to feel frightened at his deed.

"So!" began the lady, in a low tone of intense scorn; "it seemeth that the absent have foes, the present none but friends where thou art concerned, my pretty page. Tell me truly, my noble cousin Reginald, know'st thou the contents of that letter thou didst give me?"

"Nay, how could I tell?" answered Reginald, half sullenly. "You looked pleased enough to get it, Lady Marian."

"And why?" she echoed, in the same tone of scorn. "Thou knowest well. Because I thought 'twas from my own Robin, the people's friend, the noblest earl in all England, driven by traitors to lie out in the forest, when he is the peer of any that ever stood by England's throne. And thou, my cousin! thou, of my father's own blood, that thou shouldst turn traitor to me, and bring me a vile love-tale from a prince whose name is linked with naught but dishonor! Oh, Reginald, I could not have dreamed that a Fitz Walter would turn craven!"

"I am no craven," retorted the page, turning away his head, to harden himself against the looks of his beautiful cousin. "Princes are not like others."

"Dost thou know what was in that letter?" asked Marian, in the same tone of angry inquiry.

"No, I tell thee," snapped the boy.

"I will tell thee then, and thou shalt judge if 'tis a message for one of our blood to take to a lady of our house from a man who is already wed. This prince, the same whom I saw stretched on the sod this very day 'neath the lance of Robin, Earl of Huntington, calls me, ME 'his sweet love,' and asks me to don a page's dress, leave the castle, and flee with his servants to another Woodstock as Rosamond Clifford once did with his father, only to die by the just vengeance of the queen, John's own mother. Dost thou hear, Reginald? Is that a letter for a page of our house to bring to its only daughter? Am I one to become the plaything of a catiff prince, when the best knight in all England is dying for my love? Shame on thee, shame on thee, Reginald, to hurt me so!"

The lady burst into angry tears as she spoke, and the boy looked thoroughly ashamed of himself, as well as he might. Presently he urged:

"Weep not, cousin Marian. The deed is not done yet, and it may be undone or turned into good, if thou wilt."

"But thou—wilt thou help me in it?" she asked in a tone of intense eagerness, and stopping in her tears at once.

The boy hesitated.

"I might, but—the prince will never forgive me. He has promised to make me a knight and put me in attendance on his own person, if I persuade thee to flee."

"But if I show thee a way by which thou canst help me, wilt thou have courage to follow it?" she persisted.

"Come, cousin Reginald, 'tis but the choice between the spurs of a carpet knight, that will end in being hacked off by a cook's cleaver, when King Richard returns. He is Robin's close friend, as thou know'st, and will avenge him on his foes when he comes back."

"He may never come back," returned the boy, doubtfully. "He left Palestine more than a year gone, and none have heard from him since that day. It is said that he is dead and that John will be king in name as well as deed within the year."

"And I say that he is alive and will return within the year," retorted Marian, confidently. "Now then, wilt thou help me or him?"

"I dare not help thee," said the boy, growing pale. "He would find it out and kill me."

"And thou wilt be a belted knight!" said Marian in a tone of bitter scorn. "Well, suppose the spurs on thy heels, and thy horse beneath thee. Will that make thee a man to meet Robin face to face, as thou wilt have to do, soon?"

"Robin will hurt no man after to-morrow," answered the page, sullenly. "He will be swung from a gibbet ere the sun go down."

"Now by Our Lady's grace he shall not!" cried Marian with sudden energy. "Go then, coward and craven, since thou art thus traitor to thy blood and race. I will go to my father myself, show him this letter, and tell him who sent it, and who brought it. Farewell, Reginald."

She turned to depart in a flood of indignation, when the boy, recalled to his better feelings, ran after her and cried: "Stay, cousin Marian, I did but jest. I swear by the light of the holy sacramental candle that I will help thee. Is that enough?"

Marian hesitated.

"Thou wilt do all I ask, even to danger to thyself?"

"I will, indeed."

"Then all is safe and thy danger shall be nothing," she said, in a tone of delight. "Listen, Reginald, I have a plan to cozen this prince, and thou shalt execute it for me. Go to him, and tell him that I will flee with him, but not as he proposes. 'Twill be too dangerous. Tell him he must seem to go a-hunting in the forest to-morrow, with none but the Bishop of Hereford and a small train. Tell him that he will meet in the forest a page, who will take him to me, and that the Bishop of Hereford must be with him to bless our union in the Chapel of St. Hubert. That is all."

"But this cannot be," urged the boy. "The forest will be swept by armed men to-morrow, and you cannot keep your tryst."

Marian's lip curled as she asked:

"Dost think me a fool, sir page. Tell the

prince as I have said, and *no more*. If he ask what to do with his armed men, tell him that Marian Fitz Walter will be wooed in her own way, or not at all. If he cannot give up his vengeance for his love, for one day, he can never wed me."

"That he cannot do, as it is. He is wed already," suggested the page.

"Do as I tell thee, and let him think me a fool," she persisted. "Remember, he and the Bishop of Hereford I will have, or stay in the castle. And I will be wed at St. Hubert's chapel."

"I don't understand," muttered the boy. "It is not best that thou shouldst," she retorted. "Do as I tell thee and trust the rest to me."

"And I have nothing to do but this?" he asked.

"Nothing," she answered. "Thou seest I offer thee no risk. For all the prince knows, he will have succeeded in his suit."

"Then the quicker I am about it, the better," said the boy, much relieved. Meeting no objection from his cousin, who seemed to have relapsed into a musing mood, he turned away and left her alone on the battlements.

Marian, when she was quite alone, clasped her hands and raised her eyes to heaven.

"Oh, dear Lady, protector of maidens," she sighed in a low voice, "thou knowest the great danger I am about to run, but thou wilt help me, I know. If in aught I seem immodest and unmaidenly, lay it to the peril that surrounds me, and not to me."

Then she descended to her own chamber.

CHAPTER VII.

FRIAR TUCK.

"HEY, ho! for the bonny greenwood!
And hey for the stag of ten!
The town may do for the courtier crew,
But the greenwood suits brave men."

'Twas a roistering song, fit for a yeoman out after the king's deer, yet the singer was a brown-frocked friar with bare feet.

But such a friar! He stood up six feet high on the green moss under a spreading oak tree, and his broad shoulders and sturdy limbs bespoke him a man of great strength, while his open jolly face and bushy brown hair and beard indicated with equal plainness his Saxon blood. This stout friar bore in his hands a mighty quarter-staff, and looked anything but clerical, under the arches of Sherwood, singing his catch.

As he stood there, he heard another voice answering his own—a clear, high voice, as sweet as the singing of a bird, echoing his own words. The jolly friar started and listened, and presently became aware of a slender boy, in the dainty dress of a page of some great house, coming tripping down the deer-paths toward him. This youngster did not seem to be over fifteen and small for his age, but for all that he bore a little steel buckler on his arm and wore a sword at his side as proudly as a grown man, though his long black curls looked more like those of a girl. His face was as saucy and impudent in its way as that of Scathelock had been when he picked the quarrel with Robin Hood, and he looked the embodiment of pluck as much as a game bantam cock.

The jolly friar stopped his singing and surveyed the new-comer with an air of half-amused wonder, as the little fellow came saucily up and cried in his shrill tones:

"Well met, bully friar. What dost thou here, so far from thy convent? I'll have thee unfrocked for this. I know thy ways. Thou'rt after the king's deer, thou scapegrace."

The friar laughed good-naturedly.

"And an I be, Pop-o'-my-thumb, who shall save thee from a whipping, an thou tell'st on me?"

"This and this," answered the boy saucily, throwing his buckler to the front and touching his little sword as he spoke. "Have at thee, friar, as soon as thou wilt."

Again the friar laughed aloud in great amusement.

"Why, fibbertigibbet, an thou wert to strike me with that toy, and I was ever to hear of it, fore St. Dunstan, I might be tempted to cut a birch rod to teach thee thy manners. But what wouldst thou here in the greenwood, baby?"

The boy flushed scarlet with anger and drew his sword.

"I'll teach thee to talk to me of birch rods," he screamed, in his shrill tones. "Have at thee!"

"Peace, peace!" cried the friar, hardly able to speak for laughing, as he parried the fierce assault of the saucy page with his great staff. "I cry you mercy, fair sir. I would not offend your little worship for a hundred marks."

The boy desisted from his attack, perhaps the more readily that the friar's careless parries with the huge staff nearly knocked the sword out of his hand.

He tossed up his head as he sheathed his weapon and turned away, saying, in a tone of ineffable grandeur:

"Oh, very well, if thou cravest pardon, 'tis the part of a MAN to grant it thee. I pardon thee this time, but have a care, malapert."

"I will, your little worship," said the friar, humbly, with a twinkle of his eyes that belied his gravity. "And what brings you to the greenwood to-day, little gentleman?"

"Hark ye, friar," replied the page, turning on the other a pair of great blue eyes that sort of ill with his glossy raven hair: "I will that thou hast not so many 'littles' in thy talk. I am none so small."

He elevated himself on his toes and squared his small figure before the friar, as he spoke, but the other only laughed aloud:

"Your little worship is too peppery. We cannot help our sizes. What would ye here, once more."

"Mine own business and none of thine," retorted the page, saucily. "Who art thou that asks?"

"Marry, men call me Friar Tuck, the curial monk of Sherwood Forest, fair sir. As for my business, I am father confessor for a hundred as good fellows as ever bent bow on the king's deer. Time was when I followed the Abbot of Fountain Abbey, but I' faith I loved better to hear the lark sing than the mouse squeak, so I ran to the greenwood."

The boy looked curiously at him and asked: "Hast thou heard no news of late in the greenwood? Has not the banished Earl of Huntington taken refuge here?"

The friar started and bent his bushy brows, while his jolly face became stern.

"Thou askest too many questions, lad," he said, gruffly. "For aught I know, thou mayest be a spy of the black bishop, Gilbert of Hereford, whom our captain wishes to catch."

The boy looked round as if to see that none were in hearing, and his face became rosy red as he answered:

"I have run away from home to join Robin Hood's band. Take me to him, good friar, and I will reward thee well. See, I have gold."

Friar Tuck laughed in his old jolly tones.

"I thought as much. Thou join our band, baby! Why thou couldst not bend a birding-bow. Get thee home, get thee home to thy mother, child. We need none but good men and stout, here."

The page's eyes filled with tears in a moment, and he approached the burly friar in an attitude of supplication.

"Good Friar Tuck, sweet Friar Tuck, thou know'st not what I would say to thy captain. I cannot, indeed, I cannot go home. I must see Robin Hood."

"Nay, nay, boy, thou know'st not what it is to live in the greenwood and see never a house," answered the burly friar. "Go home, I say. What if they do warm thy jacket and hose with a good stout rod? 'Twill make thee grow all the faster. Go home, I say."

"I will not go home," said the boy, stamping his little foot impatiently. "Take me to Robin Hood at once, thou burly friar, or 'twill be the worse for thee."

Friar Tuck shrugged his shoulders and grinned.

"Knowest thou the rules of our band?" he asked. "Any man who enters it must be able to do something better than any other man. Canst wield a staff to beat me, baby? Canst shoot against the captain? Canst play sword and buckler with our Scathelock, or take a hug and a fall from Much the Miller? Canst run with Little John or sing with Allan-a-dale?"

The boy listened to the catalogue of rustic accomplishments enumerated by the friar, till he came to the close, when he brightened up and answered:

"I'll run any man in the band, and I'll sing against your Allan-a-dale any time. Take me to Robin Hood."

Friar Tuck shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"Nay, then, an thou wilt see him, indeed, come along with me. We'll see an thou canst indeed run as thou say'st."

As he spoke, he started off through the woods at a dog trot, followed by the page.

CHAPTER VIII.

BISHOP GILBERT.

BISHOP GILBERT of Hereford mounted his mule and rode slowly out of the village of Loxley toward the Forest of Sherwood, followed by his train. Prince John had sent him his orders to proceed to the chapel of St. Hubert in the heart of the forest; and the bishop could not refuse, though he did not relish the ride. The prince had raised him from the dignity of abbot to that of bishop in a single day, and he had a shrewd notion that if he kept on good terms with the Regent of England, the time might come when he would take the place of the Bishop of Ely as Lord Chancellor of the kingdom.

Therefore, the haughty bishop made him ready to go as soon as he received the summons sent him by the mouth of Reginald the page. He knew that Sherwood Forest was full of robbers, and more than half suspected that his nephew, Robin, had been well received by these outlaws and chosen their leader, but he trusted to the patrols of armed men promised by the new sheriff to make the woods too hot for the people he feared.

The bishop's train was large and well-appointed. He had his steward and chaplain, secretary and almoner, three or four monks of the buttery, and half a dozen lay brothers to lead along the sumpter mules, all heavily loaded with the bishop's trunks and bags. Besides these, there was a little band of some twenty well-armed serving-men, equipped with swords and long staves, steel caps and buckles, so that their master felt pretty secure as he ran his eye over his well-appointed following.

Slowly, and with all the dignity that became his new office, the Bishop of Hereford ambled out of Loxley, scattering his benediction on the little urchins who ran out to flock around his path. Once out of the village and into the forest, he followed the broad white road that led toward Nottingham, till he and his train were deep into the heart of the woodland, out of sight and hearing of aught save the birds. In fact, they were very soon surrounded by almost absolute silence, for the tramping of the mules and clatter of arms frightened away the birds from the vicinity of the road, and left them in solitude. The dust lay thick on the track and rose in white clouds over the train as they passed along, and somehow it came about that the stillness in the woods produced a corresponding stillness in the party. Very soon all of the servants were dead silent, and the monks began to glance in a frightened manner into the leafy screen of woods on each side, as if fearing that something might come out on them. As for Bishop Gilbert, he felt far from easy, but he concealed his fears and rode slowly on, relying on the promise of Prince John and the sheriff.

After several miles of this sort of travel, they came to a side-road, small and grass-grown, where the old and nearly obliterated ruts showed that country carts sometimes went. Under a great oak tree at the opening of this by-road sat a tall, heavy-built monk, industriously reading his breviary, and so busily engaged that he did not notice them as they came up, till the bishop almost rode over him, saying in his stern, disagreeable way:

"What now, brother? Why so earnest? Tell us the way to St. Hubert's chapel."

The big monk looked up and seemed to be stricken with mortal terror at the sight of the bishop in his violet robes, for he jumped up and then fell on his knees, crying: "I have sinned, your holiness. Forgive me and let me have your blessing."

The bishop carelessly extended his hand and pronounced the formula of benediction, after which he repeated his question: "What is the way to St. Hubert's chapel?"

"Holy Father, I'm its unworthy custodian," replied the big friar with a bow and a smirk. "If your eminence will be pleased to follow, I will show you."

"Lead on," said the bishop, not ungraciously, for the title of "eminence" pleased him, showing that this simple country friar took him for a cardinal.

The monk, accordingly, with much solemnity closed his book and placed it in his bosom; and then took up from under the tree a great staff that had anything but a peaceful appearance.

"Why dost thou carry such a staff, brother?" asked the bishop, in a sour tone.

The friar sighed deeply.

"Sinner that I am, your holiness, 'tis but a frail protection against the evil men that inhabit these woods and sometimes seek to disturb me at my devotions before the shrine of St. Hubert."

With these words the burly friar set off toward

the road at a slow trot, carrying the staff over his shoulder, while the bishop ambled along behind him, thinking principally of his own importance as he went. The monks in his train, not being so high in rank, had less to think about, and began to look decidedly uneasy as they advanced. The little road on which they were, soon ceased to have even the semblance of a track, and became narrower and narrower till it was a mere bridle-path, wandering here, there and everywhere, and seeming to go all around the compass.

Still the Bishop of Hereford did not suspect any harm, till the stout friar in front led the party down into the bed of a swamp, through which the road undulated over quaking ground, and finally disappeared.

Then at last he drew rein and angrily asked:

"Where are we going now, brother? Where is this chapel?"

"Marry, on the other side the bog, father," responded the friar, coolly. "'Tis but a few steps further, and we are out of all trouble. Your reverence has to celebrate a wedding to-day, I believe."

"How know'st thou that?" demanded the bishop, sharply, and for the first time looking uneasily round him.

"Oh, the birds and I are old friends," responded Friar Tuck (for it was he) with a chuckle. "They told me all about it and how the Abbot of Fountain Abbey had shorn his nephew, Robin, of all the fleece on his back. Marry, if Robin Hood sees him, the Bishop of Hereford may go home shorn."

"What means all this?" again cried the bishop in a tone of querulous anxiety. "Where am I?"

"In the heart of Sherwood Forest, and close to St. Hubert's chapel," answered the friar, with a laugh.

"Come, master bishop, Robin Hood has sworn thou shalt dance at his wedding to-day. Let us on, for there is no turning back."

"Seize this insolent knave," cried the angry bishop, his face turning ashy pale as he wheeled his mule to flee. "We are betrayed and undone."

As the serving-men ran to obey the order, the burly friar suddenly threw off his brown robe and cowl, making his appearance in a close-fitting suit of dark green, and raised both hands to his mouth, blowing a high shrill whistle of remarkable keenness. As soon as he had done so, he was answered by the baying of hounds, and one might hear the distant rustle of brushwood at the rapid approach of a great pack of dogs, piled in all colors, as they came tearing along, full cry.

Then the burly friar sent his huge staff whirling round his head like a mill-wheel, and instead of waiting for the bishop's servants to attack him he ran at them, dealing such tremendous blows with his mighty weapon that he knocked over the foremost like ninepins, and sent the rest back in a clump, afraid to advance any more. Presently, while they halted, half afraid, up came the dogs, fifty or more in number, baying savagely and enough to frighten any sane man. This capped the climax, for instantly the bishop's servants began to climb the nearest trees, like sensible men. As for the bishop's monks, they were quite bewildered with terror, and soon began to imitate the servants, as best they knew how, making a very ludicrous figure in their long gowns as they shinned up the trunks. At last it happened that when the dogs arrived on the scene they found nothing but the Bishop of Hereford himself, sitting on his mule, very pale, but too proud to show terror, while Friar Tuck was roaring out his stentorian laugh at the sudden scatterment.

"Methinks we had best go on to the chapel now, master bishop," he said coolly, laying his hand on the churchman's bridle. "The hounds will take care of thy men, or I mistake me much."

The bishop made no reply, in the extremity of his mortification, and the jolly friar quietly led away the mule along the boggy path, till they reached higher ground and saw before them the low timber walls and thatched roof of a tiny chapel, buried in the heart of the forest. Here is St. Hubert's, your reverence," observed Friar Tuck. "'Tis but a small place, but then, you know, St. Hubert was a born huntsman, and he can put up with a lodge in the woods. Will it please your eminence to dismount? The wedding train will soon be here."

"I can do nothing without my robes and the acolytes for the service," answered the bishop sullenly. "If these robbers harm me, I will hurl the curse of the church on them."

The big friar laughed again, and pointed be-

hind the bishop. There were all the mules belonging to the party, in a long file, patiently following the bishop without riders or leaders, as mules always will in a caravan, if left alone.

"The dumb beasts have a feeling for the church, father," observed Friar Tuck with a chuckle. "They have brought along your wardrobe, so that the ceremony may lack nothing of dignity. I myself will be your assistant and help you put on your robes, while I can promise you as handsome a lot of boys for acolytes as you ever saw. Come, father, dismount."

"I cannot till I know that my men are safe," responded Bishop Gilbert sullenly.

"Safe! Marry, they are safe enough as long as they keep up their trees," said the jolly friar, with a chuckle. "An they come down too soon, I'll not insure them from my hounds, who are, so to say, hungry this morning. But I'll answer for it, your reverence, the men will not come down. Once more, will you not dismount and enter the chapel?"

There was something in the tones of Friar Tuck's voice, as he spoke the last words, that sounded so menacing that the bishop slowly dismounted from his mule before the door of the chapel, which was ornamented with the head of a stag, bearing a gold cross between its antlers, the emblem of the patron saint of the edifice.

As the churchman dismounted, he gazed all round him into the silent woods, and beheld not a living being, save his own men, down in the swamp, surrounded by the hounds, who had couched themselves expectantly under the trees. Friar Tuck observed his glance and said in a tone of peculiar meaning:

"Your reverence is looking for the congregation. It will soon be here, wedding train and all. We expect a prince of the blood to-day. Come in, father."

As he spoke he led the way into the chapel.

CHAPTER IX.

PRINCE JOHN.

PRINCE JOHN of England was up betimes that morning and dressed himself with unusual care, while his face wore an expression of conceited satisfaction that told of his good fortune. Reginald the page had brought him the message from Marian, and the prince was beside himself with joy. He was to ride into the forest, where a page would conduct him to meet her, and they would be married at St. Hubert's chapel. To be sure, there was one little obstacle in the way: John had a wife already. In those days, however, the laws of bigamy had little force against princes of the blood, and still less against John, who was regent of all England. All he needed was an accommodating churchman to shut his eyes and perform the ceremony, and for this the new bishop of Hereford was peculiarly well-fitted, from gratitude and interest alike.

Only one thing John would not do, spite of Reginald's hints. He would not countermand the order to send out Sir Roger Warman with all his posse to scour the woods. The sheriff of Nottingham had gone away at daybreak, full of his project to raise at least a thousand men and clear the forest of the outlaw earl.

"Nay, nay, sir page," said the prince, when he was told Marian's words. "If she wishes to save the life of her late suitor, she must beg it of me after we are wed, and he is taken. I will celebrate our wedding night by his pardon as she will, but not else. Come, gentlemen, 'tis time we were to horse."

He was about leaving the room when he was arrested by a message, sent from Baron Fitz Walter, in great distress, to beg the assistance of the prince and the sheriff's posse.

The Lady Marian Fitz Walter had disappeared from the castle, and even her bower-maidens knew not whither she had gone. Her little Arab horse, a present from a crusading uncle, had been taken from the stable; and that was all that was known of her. She must have gone on horseback.

Prince John took the news very coolly, not to say in a cavalier manner.

"What have I to do with this old man and his daughter?" he asked, sarcastically, of the old steward who brought the tidings. "I cannot be hunting distressed damsels for other men. Let her father rest content. This Lady Marian knows well where she goes, and will come to no harm. If I see her, I will tell her that her father wishes her to return home. Farewell, gentlemen of the castle. Bid Lord Fitz Walter adieu for me. I shall stay no longer, now that the Lady Marian is gone."

So saying, with hardly even the semblance of courtesy for his late host, the dissolute prince rode out of the court-yard, followed by all his

train, ordered his baggage sent on to Nottingham, and struck off into the forest almost alone, only three courtiers following him. All wore their richest habits, and were lightly armed, for John anticipated no danger, owing to the patrols that had been ordered into the forest.

This prince was so fond of pleasure as to be quite reckless of results when following it, and his imagination was so much inflamed by the picture of Marian yielding to his advances that he rode rapidly on by the same road that the bishop had followed some hours before, and thought of no danger whatever. He felt sure that the flight of the girl from the castle was to meet him, and he made haste to the rendezvous, which was at the same by-road where Friar Tuck met the bishop.

But John saw no burly friar when he arrived at the entrance of the wood-path. A much more pleasing apparition met his eyes, in the shape of the same saucy page who had come to the friar, early that morning, asking to be taken to Robin Hood.

In a moment John's eyes lighted up with pleasure, as he thought that he recognized under the gay dress of the page the slender figure of Marian. He rode up hurriedly, and was about to greet her, when he paused in surprise. The forest page was something like the baron's daughter in the face, but he had glossy black hair and eyebrows, while Marian's curls were of the palest gold. Moreover, there was something in the peculiarly saucy and impudent look of this page that belied the supposition that he could be Marian in disguise.

"Well, gay knight, whither bound?" asked the little saucebox, independently twirling a slender staff in his hand, as he surveyed the prince. "Thou look'st a laggard to thy trust, to make a lady wait for thee, on thy wedding-day and hers."

"Fair page, I cry you mercy," responded John, in a tone of doubtful gayety. He could not quite make out in his own mind whether the page was Marian or not.

"Will you not ride on my horse before me to the chapel?" he continued. "'Tis ill that one so young and tender should have to walk afoot."

"I mount before no man," said the boy, saucily. "If thou wilt give up thy horse to me and go afoot thyself, I will ride, but not else."

"I will, blithely," responded the prince, leaping from his saddle. "Let me help you up, fair youth."

As he endeavored to touch the little page, still half doubtful, but thinking to determine his doubts, the boy slipped away from him into the woods, where a horse could not follow, and ran off, crying:

"Catch who catch can, is the rule here. If you would have a bride, she must be won, fair sir."

Quite certain now that he was right, John eagerly followed the fast-vanishing boy or girl, as it might prove, into the depths of the wood, so intent on the pursuit that he forgot all about his followers, who, on their part, discreetly remained at the entrance of the wood-road, not to interfere with the pleasures of their master.

John was a strong and active man, but he was no match for the little page before him in fleetness or in knowledge of the ground, and his high living had impaired his wind. Before they had been running ten minutes he was pretty well exhausted and quite out of breath, while the page kept about the same distance before him, apparently without effort. They were in the heart of the dense forest of Sherwood, and not a living being seemed to be near them, for John's followers were long out of sight, when the prince called:

"Stay a moment, sweet Marian. Why flee from me thus? Why should we not go quietly to St. Hubert's chapel together, as becometh bridegroom and bride?"

The page halted and allowed the prince to come a little closer, when he said, warningly:

"No nigher, or 'twill be the worse for thee."

But John, trusting that all this previous resistance had been mere coyness, moved on despite the warning, till nearly close enough to clasp the slender figure of the disguised girl, for Marian it was indeed.

He never was destined to place his arm quite around her. Just as his foot pressed the moss by hers, he felt a strong hand on his own shoulder, and found himself jerked back, with more force than ceremony, to be confronted by a tall, strapping young fellow, in bright scarlet clothes, who cried:

"How now, Jack o' the town? Leave the boy alone. He is one of us, now."

Where the youth in scarlet had sprung from, seemed to John a mystery; but, a moment later, six more tall fellows in green leaped out from behind the trunks of trees and surrounded the prince, menacingly twirling their big staves in a suggestive manner.

CHAPTER X.

ST. HUBERT'S CHAPEL.

"A BOLD fellow this, to roam Sherwood alone," said the tallest man, none other than Little John. "How much money hast thou in thy purse?"

The prince drew himself up haughtily, and flashed out his sword, for he did not lack courage.

"Avaunt, ye villain caitiffs," he cried. "Do ye know that 'tis John of England ye have met? Down on your knees, and implore pardon."

But, to his surprise, none of the yeomen quailed before his fierce looks, and Scathelock actually laughed as he advanced on him.

"Put up thy sword, fool," said the red youth in a tone of scorn. "We know who thou art, and we care not. The captain wills that thou dance at his wedding to-day, and by the rood thou shalt, or we'll know the reason why. Put up thy sword, I say."

But John, thoroughly exasperated, would not listen to reason, and made a blow at the young forester, which Scathelock repaid by a sounding whack of his staff, that sent the prince's sword flying. Not till then did the regent see the futility of impotent anger, and determine to preserve his dignity at least. He folded his arms, saying:

"Murder me if you dare, traitors. Ye are seven to one, but it will be repaid ye all."

"Not so, your highness," responded Scathelock, suddenly changing his tone and speaking with a low obeisance. "We intend no harm to you, but that you should accompany us to St. Hubert's Chapel; where, we believe, your grace was going, when you started into the wood."

"And suppose I will not go?" asked the prince angrily.

"Then we shall be obliged to drive your highness with our staves," said the scarlet one, coolly. "Respect we will show, as long as your highness behaves like a prince. When a man turns mule, he gets only blows."

All this time, the seeming page had stood quietly watching the discomfited prince with a smile. Now he cried out in a mocking tone:

"Who would get a bride must win her, sir prince. Follow again."

Away went he or she as it might be; and John, more to hide his chagrin than because he had any heart in the race, ran after. As for Scathelock and the other yeomen, they contented themselves with following the pair at a respectful distance, and so the party traversed the woods till they came to the little swampy place where the train of the Bishop of Hereford, bayed by Friar Tuck's huge hounds, were sorrowfully roosting in the trees and watching the dogs in great disgust. The hounds rose to their feet and fawned on Marian and the yeomen as they advanced, to show that they were old friends; but growled in such an ominous manner round Prince John, that he was compelled, sorely against his will, to retire to the company of Scathelock for protection.

They passed through the swamp without any serious misadventure, and arrived in front of the chapel of St. Hubert, to find the vicinity thronged with tall, stout fellows, in green forest-dress, all carrying their great bows and staves, while a round buckler and sword hung from each man's belt.

They seemed to be picked for size and strength. Not one was less than six feet high, and all were heavily built, healthy, active-looking fellows. The prince noticed, as he neared the chapel, that all scowled on him, and he recognized the features of more than one who had suffered the penalty of the Norman forest law, by losing an ear or a nose, for no crime but poaching in the forest.

He began to realize that he was in a place of some peril, and to wish himself out of it. He was a Norman, whereas the yellow hair and beards of these rough yeomen showed that they were all of the subject Saxon race, embittered by long tyranny.

No one offered to touch him, however, and the prince strode on proudly toward the chapel, thinking to himself that his turn would soon come, if he were only patient enough, for the sheriff's posse must very soon be out upon them. Thus thinking, he doffed his plumed cap and

entered the chapel, the pretended page having entered it a moment before. As the prince scanned the room, however, he could see no page, and began to realize that there was more in the trick that had been played on him than met the eye.

He was almost instantly, at his entrance, confronted by the beadle, an official clothed in a blue gown and bearing a long staff like that of a drum-major, to keep the younger part of the congregation in order.

This individual advanced to Prince John with a bow of great ceremony, and ushered him into a place in front of the altar, where the prince calmly took his seat and looked around him. He was curious to see how all this was going to end, and by no means apprehensive for his own life. He realized that the outlaws would never dare to do violence to the person of the regent of all England, for fear of the vengeance that would surely overtake them; and he wondered exactly what was going to happen. He noticed that quite a little congregation of children was assembled, with several women, young and old, all of the rustic kind, in their red cloaks and bare feet. The country people, on their part, seemed to be no less interested in the person of the richly dressed cavalier before the altar, for they stared at him in a shamefaced way, dropping their eyes when they met his. The interior of the chapel was simple as the exterior, with its open wooden roof, the ends of the beams carved into grotesque figures, the floor of hard clay, beaten flat. Only the high altar gave some evidences of art, being decorated with a rude group in stone, representing the hunter Hubert of the legend, kneeling before the stag that bore the cross between its antlers, to remind him that he was violating the sanctity of Good Friday by hunting on that holy of all holy days. Prince John was of course familiar with the legend of the sudden conversion and final saintship of that ardent sportsman, St. Hubert, and paid no attention to the group, turning impatiently to the side door as if expecting some one. He had not long to wait. There was the whistle of a pitchpipe in the rear of the church, and all the children stood up and began to sing an anthem, in the midst of which, out of the vestry came Friar Tuck in full canonicals, preceding the Bishop of Hereford, and preceded himself by four beautiful altar-boys or acolytes, swinging their censers. Then the eyes of the prince and the bishop met, and John saw that he had been tricked in some way. He threw himself back in his chair and frowned deeply, sitting there swinging his foot to and fro, and waiting for what was to come.

The chanting went on, the priests took their stations by the altar, and then eyes began to turn to the door, as if more than one person expected visitors.

Presently the choir burst into a strain of exultation, the doors opened wide, and into the little church swept a train of girls in white, headed by the Lady Marian Fitz Walter herself, in the veil and robes of a bride, not a single man being seen in the train.

With a glad bound the prince sprung to meet her, thinking that all before was only a jest. She allowed him to take her hand, the saucy smile which had overspread her features when disguised as the page having given way to a look of demure gravity, just as the raven wig had been replaced by her own golden hair. Without opposition they proceeded to the altar, John hardly daring to believe in his good fortune, and instantly the Bishop of Hereford began to read the wedding service.

He was not allowed to read far, however. Just as he was closing the preliminary exhortation, there was a soft muffled trampling of feet on the floor, and the prince looked round to find himself beside the outlawed Earl of Huntington, Robin Hood himself, who stood looking at him, glittering in a magnificent dress of green velvet and gold, and followed by a crowd of yeomen who filled the aisle.

Without saying a word, Robin Hood quietly moved the astounded prince back into the crowd, took his place in front of him, squaring his broad shoulders, then fixed his eyes sternly on the bishop, as if daring him to stop the service he was reading.

Whether John would have resisted, had he been less taken by surprise, is uncertain, but he had no chance as it was. The moment that Robin Hood shoved him back, he was seized from behind by both arms, and held firmly to witness the marriage ceremony, while Friar Tuck moved his burly frame up beside that of the bishop, and whispered audibly:

"Go on, your reverence, or they may shoot." Thus warned, the bishop hurried on the ser-

vise at racing speed, while the prince, swelling with rage and mortification, was compelled to stand and watch the marriage of his rival without saying a word. He did indeed once try to cry out, but at the first word a handkerchief was thrown over his mouth from behind; and there he was, speechless and powerless, but still gifted with eyes and ears that witnessed his impotence and anger.

The ceremony proceeded without a word of interruption, till the bishop had pronounced the benediction; and then, for the first time, Robin Hood spoke.

"At last we are one, my Marian, thou and I. John of England, we are quits. Set him free."

Instantly the stout yeomen who had been holding the prince released him and removed the handkerchief from his mouth. Before he could say a word, Robin Hood had embraced the bride and called out:

"Now, merry men, to the feast! The prince and the bishop will dine with us, and we shall have brave company to dance at our wedding. Come, my lords."

John was ready to choke with fury, and the bishop was not far from the same condition, as the outlawed earl swept from the chapel at the head of his train; while his two unwilling guests were compelled to follow him. Little John and Will Scarlet supported the prince on either side, ostensibly as attendants, but really as guards; while Friar Tuck performed the same kind office for the bishop.

So they left the chapel, and found outside a huge table, set out under the trees, covered with venison pasties, and game of all kinds, fresh from the huge fires that blazed away in the rear, while two great casks of wine on tap, and a goodly array of silver goblets on the table showed that the company was not likely to go thirsty. Bishop Gilbert gazed sorrowfully enough at the head of the table, as he was led to his place; for he recognized several of the cups as taken from his own baggage, which lay open and empty on the ground.

"Two thousand marks gone!" he groaned in spirit, as he thought of the sum that he had carried away from the fair lands of Huntington, now reverting to their former owner. Robin Hood noticed the look and sigh, and cried, gayly:

"No use crying for spilt milk, uncle mine. The church needs no riches, and I do—more's the pity. Come, merry men, to the feast!"

And to the feast went every one with a will, save only the prince and the bishop. Even they thawed out somewhat, under the influence of the generous fare set before them; and Prince John had almost drowned his troubles when the outlawed earl rose to propose a toast.

"Merry men of the greenwood," cried Huntington, "to-day we begin our wild free life, we outlaws of Sherwood. Not a man of us but has suffered from Norman law, not a man but holds his life on the point of his sword. From this day forth, we are all equal, and the Earl of Huntington is dead. From this day let none call me aught but Robin Hood, your chief and brother. Here by my side sits the maid I love, and here I swear that till King Richard be come again to his own, this lady remains in our midst, as pure a maid as any in England. All hail then, to Maid Marian, the Queen of Sherwood!"

"Maid Marian! Maid Marian!" shouted the outlaws in chorus. "A dance! A dance!"

Instantly the tables were deserted, and the outlaws began to choose their partners from among the buxom country lasses who had swarmed out of the chapel after the wedding, when a scene of great jollity commenced.

Prince John, just drunk enough to enter into the frolic, gravely opened the dance with Maid Marian herself, who accepted his hand with a roguish smile. Friar Tuck, not to be behind, seized hold of the Bishop of Hereford, and compelled that dignified prelate to caper as nimbly as any in the ring; so that all was going on swimmingly, when shouts and the furious barking of the hounds in the swamp showed that some peril was approaching.

The dance was deserted in a moment, and the stout yeomen ran for their weapons, for they could see, coming down through the woods, a long line of horse and foot, glittering with steel, and evidently approaching with hostile intent.

"My turn at last, traitor!" shouted the prince at this sight.

"Here comes Sheriff Warman and his posse. Who shall save thy Maid Marian, now?"

As he spoke, he clutched the girl firmly round the waist with one arm, drew his sword, which had been restored to him, and shouted:

"To the rescue! To the rescue! John of England is bayed by treason! Rescue!"

There was an answering shout, as five hundred men-at-arms came trampling through the woods, bearing down on the eighty armed yeomen. The odds of numbers were at least two to one.

CHAPTER XI. BOWS AND BILLS.

WELL was it then for Robin Hood and his merry men that they were all picked for size, strength and courage; for ordinary men would have succumbed at once to the odds against them. As it was, the stout outlaws showed no dismay at the surprise, but prepared to resist as coolly as if the fight were a mere game of archery. The women ran hurriedly into the chapel, whither Bishop Gilbert, in mortal terror of the flying arrows, followed them betimes; but Marian, instead of seeking refuge there, hurried away to her little horse, which stood beneath a tree, and Prince John had the mortification of seeing her snatched from his arms by main force, while the companion of her flight was the young minstrel, Allan-a-dale, who had been Robin Hood's herald at the tournament.

A moment later, the outlaws had gathered into a long, irregular semicircle, facing their foes on every hand, and began to shoot. John, helpless to aid his friends, seemed to be an object of perfect indifference to the archers, for they allowed him to remain in their midst without noticing him, even Robin Hood not giving him a look.

The first volley of those terrible arrows, each a yard long, sent with the force of the best men of the country-side, produced a serious effect on the assailants.

Men and horses dropped in several places, and others could be seen, with the arrows still sticking in them, halting in doubt. Then the outlaws raised a shout of taunting defiance which seemed to sting their enemies into new life, for their trumpets sounded, and on they came, driving in the dogs who had been baying them, the animals becoming demoralized by the rush of the horsemen. A moment later, one might see the sword-and-buckler-men of the Bishop of Hereford, coming down out of their roosts in the swamp to join a great mob of footmen that was rushing on behind and around the horsemen.

Despite all the showers of arrows the outlaws could send, they could not repulse their foes entirely.

The steel bucklers of the footmen, and the triangular shield of the men-at-arms warded off many a shaft, and the great numbers of the sheriff's *posse* enabled them to extend their line and curl round the outlaws, like a snake closing its folds. As they came closer and closer, a few cross-bowmen, who seemed to have been pressed into their ranks, began to shoot, and it became plain that Robin Hood and his men must flee.

During the whole fight Prince John had remained a passive spectator, after his first outburst; but when he saw the outlaws beginning to give back he renewed his shouts to his own men to come to the rescue. He was rewarded by witnessing a grand charge, in the midst of which Robin Hood set a bugle to his lips; and in a trice, at the sound of that bugle, the whole body of yeomen fled in apparent dismay, scattering in the woods and seeking the thickest coverts.

John shouted to encourage his men, and soon found himself almost alone, outlaws, *posse* and all being engaged in the woods, receding further and further every moment.

Presently up rode Sir Roger Warman, crying:

"Praise to St. Hubert, your grace is safe!"

"Never mind me, Warman," said the prince, hastily. "After those catiffs, and kill me every man, but bring back Marian for me."

The new sheriff bowed and galloped away, so that the sound of the conflict rapidly faded into the distant woods, and John was once more left alone to listen.

After awhile he heard the shouts and bugle-calls no more, and a silence ensued, which was at last broken by the rustle of brushwood, as the men of the sheriff's *posse* came straggling back, led by Warman himself, and bearing in their midst two of the redoubtable outlaws, as prisoners.

"What have ye done with the rest?" angrily inquired the prince of Warman. "Have ye not slain the catiff earl? Where is the lady Marian?"

"My liege," stammered Warman, confusedly, "we chased them into the fens at the edge of the

forest, where the horses could go no further for the mire and water; and there the villains gave us the slip. But we have taken two of them, an't please your grace."

"It pleases *not* my grace," said John, angrily; "but since they have fooled you again, let us see who these prisoners are. Hah!" he cried with a tone of angry triumph, as his eyes fell on Little John and Will Scarlet in bonds; "it is ye, my brave fellows, is it? Will ye lay hands again on John of England? It is well, Warman. I have here two as big knaves as any in the realm. Put them in irons, carry them to Nottingham, and an thou lose them there, thy head be the forfeit. Ho! my horse!"

He mounted the nearest horse, brought to him by an obsequious courtier, who dismounted for the purpose, and rode off toward Nottingham, biting his lips with rage and mortification at the various tricks to which he had been subjected that day.

As for the new sheriff of Nottingham, we may be sure that he obeyed strictly his orders to guard the two yeomen carefully. He had seen too much of their strength and agility to despise them, and they had only been taken alive after a desperate struggle and in consequence of an accident, while lagging behind the rest to cover the retreat.

Little John had caught his foot over a root in running, and sprained his ankle enough to disable him for several minutes, while Scathelock had been taken in trying to rescue his friend.

They stood now, sullen and defiant, in the midst of their guards, their wrists bound tightly behind them with strong cords, while a spearman walked behind each to prick him up to his work, and two more in front prevented a thought of escape.

"So, ye villains!" said the sheriff, triumphantly. "At last your time has come! Hale them along, and we will have, ere to-morrow's sun be set, as fine a hanging in Nottingham, as ever the town saw, when these rascals shall be dancing on nothing under the gallows tree."

Little John looked at him and grinned contemptuously.

"The rope to hang *me* is not spun yet, master sheriff," he observed. "'Tis an old adage, hatch your chicks ere ye count them."

"And I'll wager a gold angel we are in the merry greenwood ere the week's out," quoth Scathelock.

Then without further banter, the procession started toward Nottingham.

CHAPTER XII. WHERE IS THE KING?

OUT in the midst of the dark forest of Barnesdale, which ran into Sherwood at the other side of the fen, sat Robin Hood and a group of his men, that night, discussing the fate of the captives. Maid Marian, once more in the page's dress in which she had fled to the greenwood, sat near them and listened to the conversation, while Friar Tuck, at a little distance off, sat at the foot of a tree, gloomily eying the ground. As for the harp of Allan-a-dale, it lay idly on the turf beside its master.

"I see not what is to be done, captain," quoth Much the Miller, scratching his head. "'Tis plain we cannot storm Nottingham, and they are safe inside the castle walls long ere this."

"But still I say that my brave men *must* be saved, if I have to do it myself," answered Robin Hood, firmly. "Which of you will volunteer to carry a letter from me to King Richard?"

"To King Richard, quotha!" echoed George-a-Green. "Why, captain, none know where the good King Richard is now. We know that he was in Palestine, warring with Saladin, a twelvemonth past, but none have heard of him since the day when he put to sea from Jaffa, save that his ship sailed into the port of Venice, and that he was not on board."

"Nevertheless," responded Robin Hood, "I would find a messenger, to take from me a letter to King Richard, in whatever land he be. Who will go?"

"That will I, master," suddenly spoke out Allan-a-dale, a slender, fair-haired young man, who looked out of place among the rough outlaws, but who was famous for his skill on the harp, and for the readiness with which he made verses as a minstrel.

Robin Hood turned doubtfully toward him.

"Thou!" he said, in a tone of hesitation. "Thou art not a strong man, Allan, and the king is said to be in prison in far countries. How wilt thou get to him?"

"A minstrel travels where he will, captain," replied Allan, confidently. "It needs none of your brawny men of might to travel in far

countries, but one that can make himself welcome in bower and hall. I will take thy letter; and, what is more, I will find the king and bring him back to England. But all this will not help Little John or Will Scarlet."

"As for them, 'tis but a small job to get them out," observed Robin Hood, indifferently; "but after they are out, we are still the same outlaws as ever, unless King Richard be back to remove the unjust sentence of John. Bethink thee, Allan, we were all boys together once, and played on the same green. Richard and Geoffrey loved me, but John was ever envious, because I could throw him any time at a wrestle. If I could but see King Richard back once more, I should know that we were safe, and our foes confounded."

"Then I will take the letter, master," quoth Allan-a-dale, simply.

"And I will save our comrades," quoth Maid Marian, just as quietly and simply.

All the men stared at the slender girl, in her boy's dress, as she made this remark in the most matter-of-fact way in the world, and Robin Hood said, half laughing:

"Why, lady mine, what could thy lily fingers do against the men of Nottingham, and the bars and bolts of Roger Warman, the sheriff?"

"These hands can draw bolts from the inside, as Loxley Castle knew, yestreen," replied Marian, quietly. "I have escaped from one castle. Methinks I can enter another."

Here Friar Tuck, who had been quite silent during the discussion, suddenly looked up and observed:

"The lady will do it, an she says she will."

"Remember, friar, that we have no ladies in the greenwood," responded the girl. "Maid Marian I am, and by no other name am I known till Robin Hood's outlawry be reversed."

"Well then, I say that if Maid Marian tries to enter Nottingham Castle, she will do it," reiterated the stout friar; "and what is more I will stand by her an she will, and obey orders. She gave us the bishop and prince to-day, and had we but followed her advice, instead of braving the sheriff's *posse* with our feast, Little John and our bold Scathelock might be here now."

"Enough of this," answered Robin Hood waving his hand. "It boots not to find fault. Henceforth let us follow Maid Marian's advice, for she hath a wise head. Propound thy plan, sweetheart."

"My plan is simple," said Marian, quietly. "Our friends will be taken out to-morrow, about an hour before sunset, to be hung. We must be there and rescue them. The people are our friends and will help hide us. In the early morning let us be away, Friar Tuck and I, to the prison, to confess these penitents and tell them that help is coming."

"But how shall we enter the town without the people knowing who we are?" objected Much the Miller, a man of more brawn than wit.

"Never trouble thy head on that score," answered Robin Hood with a smile. "Let wiser heads do the planning, Miller. Be thine to obey orders."

"And surely that's easy enough," quoth George-a-Green, sententiously. "Thou trundest a pretty staff, Miller, but thou and I were not meant for scholars. Leave that to Allan-a-dale."

The minstrel smiled as he said:

"Fear not, brave hearts. What would be all our craft and wit, if we had not your strong arms to back us in our work? Let the captain or his clerk get ready his letter to the king. I will see that it is taken safely after we have rescued our comrades. In the meantime I bid all here good-night."

So saying, Allan-a-dale picked up his cloak, wrapped himself up and lay down with his feet to the fire, an example not slow to be followed by the others in turn. Only the outlawed earl, Robin Hood himself, remained till late into the night brooding over his schemes by the embers of the fire, while Maid Marian slept as quietly on the green turf at his feet, wrapped in cloaks, as if she had never known the luxury of a castle chamber.

Long before sunrise next day, a tall burly monk and a little lay brother, who seemed, from what one could see of his face under the cowl, to be only a mere child, walked out of Sherwood Forest on the road to Nottingham, while a large body of yeomen left the forest on the other side and advanced close to the gate of Fountain Abbey, where the Bishop of Hereford had slept that night, on the eve of his departure for his bishopric, and to recover from the fright

he had sustained in Sherwood Forest. As the sun rose, Allan-a-dale, dressed as a begging friar, knocked at the abbey wicket.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EXECUTION.

It was about three hours past midday in Nottingham when Sheriff Warman, who had just returned from inspecting the new gallows he had erected in the morning for the accommodation of the captive outlaws, was disturbed at his dinner by the announcement that two friars wished access to the prisoners, to give them the last rites of the church.

"Let the dogs die unconfessed," said Warman, brutally. "They have the prison chaplain, if they will. I want no strange friars about my prisoners. Tell them to come in here. Fore Heaven, I'll answer them soon enough."

A few moments later, the burly big friar and the little slim one who had left Sherwood Forest that very morning, came into the room, looking dusty and tired.

"Well, my masters, what would ye?" asked the sheriff, in a surly tone.

"Admittance to shrive the unfortunate men who are to die at sunset," replied the small friar, in sweet soft tones.

"You cannot go in," snapped Warman. "They have the prison chaplain, and they have rejected him with insult. Let them die unconfessed."

"But it is not the wont of English law to kill body and soul together," urged the little friar. "Every criminal has a right to choose his priest, master sheriff."

"Not when I am the master," retorted Warman, with a coarse chuckle. "I say you cannot go in—so go out."

And he laughed loudly at his own small wit. Here the tall friar suddenly advanced and spoke for the first time.

"And I say we *can* go in," he growled out.

"Look here, master sheriff, is this order good?" As he spoke he displayed, right under the sheriff's nose, a piece of parchment, bearing the signature of Bishop Gilbert of Hereford, Abbot of Fountain Abbey, Canon of Durham, and a dozen other titles, addressed to the Sheriff of Nottingham, as follows:

"In the name of the Blessed St. Dunstan, admit the bearers, Brother Hilary, of the Bernardine Order, and Lay-Brother Cyril, probationer of the same order, to shrive the outlaws of Robin Hood's band, condemned to die this evening.

"GILBERT OF HEREFORD."

"Well, sir sheriff, can we go in now?" asked the little friar, in a tone of triumph, when the other had finished reading.

"I suppose so," responded Warman, sullenly. "Not that this is any compulsion in law, master Cyril, if that be your name; but the bishop is a friend of mine. Therefore go in, and make all the praying you please."

As he spoke, he turned again to his meal, and the two priests, nothing loth, left the room, escorted by one of the sheriff's men, who led them to the door of the cell occupied by Little John and Scathecock.

As they approached the door, they heard sounds of boisterous revelry within, very much unlike what might be expected of men condemned to die within three or four hours, and the jailer grinned as he said:

"They're right merry fellows, father, but you'll not be able to bring them to confession. Marry, they drove Father Ambrose, our chaplain, out this morning with their ribald jests, and would hear none of his preaching."

"But by St. Dunstan, I'll make them hear mine," growled the big friar, showing an enormous fist, "or I'll know the reason why. Open the door, friend jailer, and let us in. Before we come out they'll be quiet enough I'll warrant you, or mine arm has forgot its cunning."

The jailer stared respectfully at the big friar, for there is something in size and strength that always inspires a certain amount of awe. Then he opened the door and admitted the two priests to the prisoners, closing it hurriedly again, but not in time to escape a great hunch of bread which Little John sent skimming at his head as soon as the door was opened.

There sat the two outlaws, free from their manacles, but unarmed, beside a table spread with bread and cheese, a pasty of wild ducks and two great jugs of ale, looking the picture of jollity as they roared out a tavern catch at the top of their voices.

They did not interrupt their occupation for the entry of the two friars until the chorus was

through, when each applied himself to his jug and took a long draught.

Then Little John spoke up, good-naturedly enough, but still menacingly, saying:

"Friars, we want none of ye. If ye value wholeskins, be off, for we don't want to hurt ye, but we do want to be left alone. Begone, ere we get angry with ye."

"Unhappy man," began the big friar in a sepulchral tone; "art thou not aware that death—"

He said no more, for Little John flipped a piece of bread with such nice aim that it struck his nose, while Will Scarlet performed the same kindly office for his mouth. Instantly the burly friar turned scarlet with anger, and made one great stride forward. With one buffet he sent Will Scarlet flying off his stool into the cell-corner, and in another moment he had dragged Little John off his seat and ran him across the floor. Then, with a sudden heave and trip, he threw the tall outlaw on top of Will Scarlet, and threw back his hood, revealing the rubicund visage of Friar Tuck as he shouted:

"How now, ye scurvy knaves, will ye lay hands on a minister of Holy Church again?"

Little John and Scathecock were used to horse-play, and took their overthrow in good part, for they both lay and laughed at the sudden surprise.

Then Little John pointed to the little monk and whispered:

"Who's yonder, friar?"

Maid Marian's face made its appearance in a moment from under the cowl as she stepped forward and said in a low tone:

"Get up and keep up your noise till I give the signal. Fight the friar."

The quickwitted outlaws took the hint, and scrambled up, after which they began a mock fight with the friar for the benefit of the jailer outside. They tore round the room shouting, smashed tables, jugs, stools and all, on the stone floor, wrestled at intervals with each other and Tuck; and during the whole excitement the friar continued to bellow at the top of his voice reproofs, exhortations and texts of warning, as if he were expostulating with the obstinate penitents. The din soon became deafening, and it seemed as if pandemonium had broken loose inside the cell. All the while, Maid Marian kept crouched close to the door, listening; and she could hear voices and hurrying steps outside, which told her that they were attracting all the attention they desired. Soon quite a crowd was collected outside and she beckoned to the wrestlers to redouble their noise, which they did.

Friar Tuck caught up the table by the leg, dishes and all, and shattered it on the stone floor, at a single blow, bellowing:

"Aha! Satan, I have thee at last! Get thee behind me! Repent, for death approaches! I am brother Hilary who has converted thousands of murderers. Repent, ye knaves!"

"Never!" shouted Little John, hurling the fragments of a stone-ware jug at the grated window of the cell. "No priests! Hurrah for Robin Hood!"

Then they picked up the table-legs and began to play quarter-staff therewith, Father Hilary exhorting to repentance between the strokes, till the table-legs were in splinters and only one heavy stool remained uninjured in the cell.

Then Marian heard calls outside:

"Open the cell door; the villains will kill the brave monk."

She gave the signal just as the first rusty bolt began to creak in its staples and the outlaws took the hint.

Down they both went on their knees, and when the door flew open, there was Father Hilary, with the three-legged stool elevated, bellowing:

"Now, ye knaves, will ye confess or not?"

And Little John and Will Scarlet wagged their heads and shivered as they shouted:

"Yes! Yes, father! We will, we will! We crave pardon!"

Then Father Hilary stepped back and waved his hand to the jailer and the gaping crowd of guards staring in.

"Go away, brethren. The danger is over," he said, quietly. "I have touched the stubborn hearts of these poor sinners at last, and they are willing to listen to the ministrations of our dear brother Cyril here. Leave us alone."

He spoke with such dignity that all retired abashed, and once more the door was closed on them. Maid Marian listened, till she was satisfied, from the retiring steps, that they were out of earshot; then darted forward to the kneeling men and said in a low tone:

"From henceforth you must be converted and

walk to the gallows among the monks. Remember, help is at hand. Now join me, and sing the *Dies Irae*."

A moment later they all began to sing the famous medieval hymn, and as they proceeded, the male voices took up so much of the melody that under its cover Marian was enabled to speak her instructions to each of the outlaws, holding her mouth close to his ear.

"Your irons will be put on, as you leave the prison," she said, "but we shall have a key to unlock them, for we have the right as friars to take charge of the prisoners till they are turned over to the hangman. Be ready to run when I give the word. That is all you need know till the time comes."

After that they continued singing aloud in the most unwearied manner, with occasional pauses of low conversation, which the outsiders imagined were for confessional purposes, till the declining sun and the blasts of trumpets in the streets announced that the crisis was near at hand.

When the rattle of armor in the court-yard heralded the approach of the guards, and Sheriff Warman made his appearance with the death-warrant, the two prisoners looked piously resigned to their fate, while their spiritual advisers were supporting them on either hand, and all four were singing away lustily.

The sheriff looked sour as he approached them.

"Stop that crying of cats," he said, sarcastically. "I have something to read to these villains."

"Rash and wicked man," answered Little John, with a snuffle, "we who are going straight to mansions of bliss need none of thy readings. Lead us to the scaffold. We long to ascend on high."

"Ay, lead on, master sheriff," added Will Scarlet, with a wink to his companion. "We are wicked wretches, for we have slain the king's deer in our time. Oh, what a basting our master gave thee, only two days ago, sheriff! Yes, I can afford to die, since I saw that."

The sheriff looked more sour than ever, as he read out the death-warrant amid a deep silence, and then said:

"Now, we have lost time enough. Take them to the gallows-tree at once."

The guards were advancing when Friar Tuck waved them aside, and pointed to the manacled wrists of the prisoners.

"They are secured," he said, boldly, "with the chains of the church. Pope Clement granted to our founder, the holy St. Bernard, the privilege that our order should always have the custody of prisoners on their way to the gallows, and we are responsible for their safety. Lead on, sir sheriff."

Warman would willingly have refused the concession, but he dared not. He knew himself to be intensely unpopular, and as the execution was to take place in the market-square of Nottingham, he feared greatly a riot among the people. He bethought himself that the common people loved the name of the outlawed earl and his followers, and that if he appeared unduly harsh to men condemned to death, it would give a pretext for a riot, which the monks could easily raise.

Accordingly, he gave a sullen half assent to the proposition, and led the way to the street, the doomed men in the center of a hollow square of guards, but still supported by the friars.

As they came out into the street, they found it occupied by a great crowd of people, and heard a great buzz of voices, over which rose the solemn tones of a penitential psalm, sung by a long procession of monks, bearing at their head the embroidered banner of Fountain Abbey. This procession came marching up the streets, just as the funeral train issued from the prison gates, and the sheriff bowed low as he recognized the figure of the new Bishop of Hereford, riding on a mule, at the head of the procession, but only dressed in the robes of the Abbot of Fountain Abbey, his lesser dignity. The bishop wore his cowl down, as did all the monks of the abbey, who followed him by twos, with downcast heads, singing the lugubrious hymn of penitence.

Silently, and as if by mutual consent, the guards of the sheriff fell back from the vicinity of the prisoners, while the monks of Fountain Abbey closed in round them and continued the procession to the scaffold. The people pressed around on all sides and so the closely packed throng moved along to the market-place, in the midst of which stood two tall gallowses, the morning work of Sir Roger Warman.

The sheriff had mounted his horse as the procession left the prison gates, and headed a troop of men-at-arms to clear the way. As soon as he saw that the bishop had come to the execution, he felt much more secure against rescue, for he knew the people would never dare to interfere with the prisoners, as long as they were under the power of the church. He gave the signal himself for his guards to encircle the monks, and henceforth devoted himself solely to the task of overwatching the outsiders.

When the head of the column reached the market-place they found it full of people, while every window was crowded with faces, and even the roof of the church was covered with gazers. The sheriff rode into the midst of the crowd with his horsemen and sternly cleared a passage with leveled lances, the troopers shouting and spurring their steeds with all the vigor of new jacks-in-office. Indeed, they seemed to take a pleasure in bullying the people; and many were the black looks and muttered curses they encountered as the populace sullenly retreated from the neighborhood or the scaffold.

"By our Lady, ye need not trample women and children to death," cried a sturdy butcher, as he caught a child almost from under the horse-hoofs of the sheriff. "A week ago a sorry clerk, and now a beggar on horseback."

Warman beckoned to his men to follow, and the stout butcher and his friends were driven back, not without some resistance and a stone thrown, after which the procession filed into the open space round the scaffold, and the doomed men ascended the platform, still in irons.

Sir Roger Warman looked round for the bishop, and beheld that ecclesiastic on the scaffold itself, beside the hangman, talking to the prisoners, who seemed to be listening with great respect to his exhortations. Then the trumpet sounded a long blast and a great stillness fell on the square. It was expected that the culprits would make their last address, and people craned their necks to hear. The sheriff walked his horse round the lines and faced all the guards outward, to check any forward movement, leaving the scaffold and vicinity entirely occupied by the brown robes of the monks, who stood behind the soldiers.

Amid a dead silence Scathe-lock advanced to the front of the scaffold and spoke aloud:

"Friends all, I have little to say. You see here two men, condemned to die for shooting the deer that Norman lords hunt for pleasure. Do you call that justice? I say that God made the deer for Saxon as well as Norman, and God save King Richard! If he were here, this would not be."

Having said this, he waved his hand and retired, while a great groan rose up from the populace, and the sheriff's guards grasped their weapons tighter, as if in expectation of an immediate rush. As for Sir Roger Warman, he called out:

"Let the other man be quick; then do your duty, hangman."

Another groan burst from the people, which was instantly hushed as the gigantic form of little John advanced to the front of the scaffold. The tall yeoman lifted himself to his full height and shouted aloud in his stentorian tones:

"What my comrade says I say! God save King Richard, and were he here, this would not be. Ho! Roger Warman, and all you people! You think you came here to see an execution. Do you know what you will see in a minute more? Do you know?"

"No, No!" "What is it?" "Tell us!" belowered the crowd.

"A RESCUE!!!" thundered the yeoman, suddenly flinging both of his manacles far into the crowd, an example instantly imitated by Scathe-lock. "ROBIN HOOD TO THE RESCUE!!!"

Instantly a magical transformation took place on and round the scaffold, as the brown robes of the monks dropped. Out leaped the merry men of Sherwood, in their forest green, armed with sword and buckler, hitherto hidden beneath their robes, and commenced a furious attack on the guards of Sheriff Warman. An indescribable scene of confusion ensued, amid which Robin Hood himself threw off the robes of Bishop Gilbert, shouting:

"Robin Hood to the rescue! Down with the Norman traitors! Fight for King Richard and Old England!"

CHAPTER XIV. THE RESCUE.

THE sudden and unexpected attack of Robin Hood's men on the rear of the sheriff's guards, and the shouts of rescue that ensued, made short

work of Warman's posse. Cut down and stabbed by the dozen, before they knew what was the matter, the unhappy soldiers broke in disorder, throwing away their weapons and calling for quarter, as they fled into the crowd and tried to hide themselves.

As for the sheriff and his horsemen, no sooner did the people see the triumph of the foresters, with whom all sympathized more or less, than they set on the sheriff and his troop as they were facing round to receive Robin Hood's men, and literally tore them from their horses, ere they had time to resist. Warman was thrown down, and only the excellence of his armor saved him from being trampled to death as the crowd surged to and fro above him.

Then, as the outlaws, formed in a compact body, came running into the crowd, the people gave way right and left, with loud cheers, crying "Robin Hood forever! The people's friend!"

Right across the market-place they went at a run, and there they found, close to the church-door, a country ox-cart, covered with a tilt, the driver one of Robin's men, his green dress hidden by a smock frock. In a trice the tilt was torn off, and the outlaws snatched up their bows, which had thus secretly been conveyed into the midst of the town, together with their long quarter-staves. As for their quivers and other weapons, the ample folds of the monks' gowns had hidden them from public gaze, therefore the foresters were once more fully armed.

In less time than it takes to tell, bows and staves were caught up, and Robin Hood recommenced his retreat out of the town gate, and so into the open country, unmolested save by the cheering and shouting crowd that followed behind them till they came to the fields.

"And now, merry men, once more to the greenwood, the wild, free greenwood, where we are no slaves!" cried their leader, as they struck into the woods. "Scatter all, and the meeting-place will be in Barnesdale, while this hue and cry is out."

At the word, the outlaws scattered to each side, as they plunged deeper into the forest. An hour later no one could have found by the tracks that a body of more than a hundred men had passed that way at sunset. The coming shades of night had been taken into Robin Hood's calculation, and he knew that before morning he and all his men would be far beyond pursuit.

Meanwhile, where was Prince John, and where was the Bishop of Hereford, whose character had been so cleverly assumed by his nephew?

As for the prince, he was already on his way to London, thoroughly disgusted with his adventures in the midlands, and determining to leave his old-time rival to the tender mercies of Roger Warman, satisfied that if the new sheriff of Nottingham could not take the outlaw, no one else could, and not caring to expose his own royal person to further humiliations at the hands of the foresters.

But the poor Bishop of Hereford was not so lucky. To find him we must go to Fountain Abbey, at whose wicket Allan-a-dale had knocked so humbly that morning about sunrise. Poor brother Ignatius, the porter, was more than half asleep when he came to the gate, and threw it wide open, drowsily remarking:

Oh, come in, Hodge Smith, come in. The keys are on the buttery table. It is the superior's key that has a broken ward. Shut the wicket after thee."

It so happened that the brothers had engaged a locksmith to come in that morning; and innocent Ignatius never noticed, as he stumbled off to snatch another nap, that he had let the enemy into his castle. He found it out a moment later, when the sturdy thumb of Much the Miller was compressing his gullet, while three stout yeomen performed the operation of bucking and gagging the poor fellow in the most rapid, silent and scientific fashion. Then Robin Hood said:

"The monks are locked up every night, so there is no danger there, but an the superior get to the bell we shall have trouble. Scour the convent and tie up the clapper."

It needs not be told that the order was promptly obeyed.

The keys of the monks' cells were found as brother Ignatius had said on the buttery table, and so far all was secure.

The outlaws tried all the doors, arousing the poor monks, who imagined it was the summons for early mass and came tumbling out of bed to the doors, to find them all still locked. The only people who got out were the new superior—ex-cellarer Father Ambrose—and the Bishop of Hereford, neither of whom was locked in for the night; but both of whom were bundled neck and heels, without any ceremony, into the first cell that was found to yield to a key, and

carefully locked in to console each other as they might.

As may be imagined, after this, the transformation scene at the scaffold became comparatively easy. The abbey wardrobe was full of extra robes and cowls, and the abbey stables contained all the ox-carts that were needed to conceal such weapons as proved too long to be hidden by the monks' gowns.

It was nearly dawn of the next day when the party that stayed by Robin Hood, consisting of Little John, Scathe-lock, Maid Marian, Friar Tuck and Allan-a-dale, came to a halt at a little hut at the edge of the Lincolnshire lowlands, and Robin Hood said:

"Now, Allan-a-dale, to thy work, and God speed thee. The letter to the king is here, written by Maid Marian, and thy horse and trappings are within this hut. Thou shalt do what no other man has ever done, ride on the bonny bay Arab steed of Maid Marian. He will carry thy weight well and safely, and never shall he fail thee in need."

Allan-a-dale took the letter handed to him by the outlaw, and kissed his hand with deep reverence.

"My lord earl," he said, "never shall I forget that, but for the heart and hand of Huntington, five years ago, my father had died in the Fleet prison for debt. I will repay that debt, or die in the attempt."

"Tut! tut! man," replied Robin Hood, lightly; "we have no earls in the greenwood, and I had forgotten all about the little favor I did Sir William-a-dale. We are all equal here under the forest trees, and the best man is the best archer. Let us see thy little steed."

In a few minutes the bay pony that had carried Maid Marian so often and so gallantly was led out accoutered with its velvet caparisons and gilded stirrups and bit. In those early days side-saddles had not been invented, and ladies still rode as they now ride in South America, so that there was no need for a change of equipage for Allan-a-dale to go on his journey. He simply changed the green forest dress and weapons he had worn for a minstrel's habit, handsome and expensive, of velvet and silk, took his harp and slung it at his back, then rode off, all alone and unarmed, into the brightening dawn to the south-east, while Robin Hood and his men turned away to the forests.

"There goes as brave a heart, if not so well versed in arms, as any in our land," observed the leader, gravely, as they watched the slowly-vanishing figure of the minstrel.

"'Tis a sweet youth," said Friar Tuck, heartily; "and one that can charm the money out of a Jew's pocket, if ye let him sing one of his melodies. Marry, I doubt me, he might wake a corpse to life, on a pinch."

"But will he find the king?" asked Scathe-lock, half to himself. "That's the rub for Allan-a-dale. Will he find him?"

"If the king be above-ground, I'll wager a rose noble that he will," responded Maid Marian, firmly. "What thinks Robin Hood on the matter?"

"Robin Hood thinks as our sweetheart thinks, that 'tis time to look about our breakfast," answered the outlaw, turning away with a laugh. "Let us go and look for't, merry men, all."

An hour later, they were sitting round a blazing fire, in the heart of Barnesdale Forest, where the rest of the band had made their rendezvous, and where three fat harts were roasting whole before the blaze, while ducks and geese without number were emitting a savory odor as they turned on the spits for the delectation of the hungry foresters.

There let us leave them, for a good twelve-month.

CHAPTER XV.

ALLAN-A-DALE.

THE spring-time buds had burst into leaf and flowers; the flowers had withered and left their fruits behind them; the green leaves had turned crisp and brown, ere they littered the earth in the rich days of autumn; and the soft white mantle of winter's snow had covered all with its noiseless fall, preserving the tender flower-roots for a new spring. That new spring had come once more, and the swallows were trooping northward in vast flocks, when Allan-a-dale, the English minstrel, drew rein at the foot of a steep rocky hill in the Tyrol, crowned with savage-looking pine trees, all writhen and twisted by the winter's storms, but clustering round the great tower and buttresses of a massive stone castle, that lorded over a village in the valley beneath it.

The minstrel paused by the clattering wheel of the little mill at the entrance of the village, and gazed up at the castle. The fat, lazy-looking miller, a Tyrolean peasant of middle age, stood at the mill-door, sleepily staring at the stranger, when Allan-a-dale, in his best German, asked:

"Whose castle is that, yonder, friend?"

"That castle belongs to my master," answered the miller, sententiously. "Who else should own it?"

"So I suppose," retorted the minstrel, with a smile; "but that does not tell me who is your master."

"My master is Duke Leopold of Austria," said Hans Dunderkopf, stolidly. "Any fool knows that."

"Well then, I'm another fool that knows it," the minstrel rejoined with a smile of good-humor. "'Tis a handsome castle, but who needs it here? The country is at peace. There are no robbers abroad."

Hans Dunderkopf grinned.

"Robbers! How could robbers get into Duke Leopold of Austria's kingdom? He would eat them all up without salt."

"Then the castle is empty?" said the minstrel inquiringly.

"Who said it was empty? Not I. They keep it for a prison now, and it holds its captives well. They have a strange knight in there, a goodly man for size; but they keep him close as an oyster in its shell."

"Have you ever seen him?"

"Oh yes, when he is let out to exercise, on parole of honor."

"And what is he like?"

"A tall, heavy man, with light curling hair and beard. He looks like a match for anything. They say the duke once tested him by setting a lion on him, and he unarmed; and that the stranger killed the beast with his bare hands and tore its heart from its smoking throat, all alone. I say not that it is true, but he is a good man to look at."

The minstrel's voice trembled with eagerness.

"Do you know his name?"

"They never call him anything in our hearing, but 'your grace'."

Allan-a-dale raised his eyes to heaven with a look of intense gratitude, as he murmured in his native English tongue:

"I have found thee at last, oh Richard, oh my king, I have found thee."

The miller stared at him in silence. He was not given to loquacity without a cause. Then the minstrel asked him:

"Is there not a governor to this castle?"

"Ja!" responded the stolid miller.

"What is his name?"

"Count Rabenstein, Count Albrecht von Rabenstein, in full. We call him just 'the count'."

"Is the count fond of the gentle art?"

The miller stared.

"*Verstehe nicht*," he growled, as if suspicious he was being made a subject for sport.

"I mean, does he love minstrelsy?"

"Oh, ay—he is a minstrel himself."

Allan-a-dale brightened up at once, bid farewell to his stolid friend, and put his stanch little pony to a trot as he went up the causeway to the castle gate.

The road wound to and fro, zigzagging up the steep ascent to avoid a grade too heavy for teams going to the castle. In one place it entirely encircled the rock on which the fortress was perched, and passed directly under a square tower, furthest from the entrance and used as the donjon or keep. As Allan-a-dale rode under this keep, he was not more than sixty feet away from the solitary window which the building showed on that side, and the minstrel involuntarily drew rein and looked up at the window, as if he expected to see there the form of the captive king. Almost at the moment he stopped, he heard the faint muffled notes of a harp like his own, and then a deep, powerful voice sung these words:

I.

"The swallow flies I come to the fair northern summer,

The storks have forsaken the reeds of the Nile,
The rose breathes a greeting, to hail the new-comer.

Sweet summer! Fair summer! Dear summer!
Flee not so fast, pretty swallow, the while
I list to thy twitter, and bask in the smile
Of the life-giving sun of sweet summer."

Then Allan-a-dale, who had been trembling all over with excitement as he listened, struck the chords of his own harp and rung out the second stanza of the dear old song, that he remembered so well as a favorite of the good King Richard:

II.

"Hie away, swallow, and whisper my love,
Twitter thy message so soft to her ear.
Tell her that I, who have roamed the world over,
I love her! I love her! I love her!
Chains cannot bind me—my soul is not here,
But away o'er the sea with my lady so dear,
Who has tamed the wild heart of the rover."

Then once more the minstrel paused, trembling with new excitement, and listening intently.

"If it be he," he murmured, the tears trickling down his cheeks, "he will answer me."

And truly the prisoner's harp was heard once again, while the voice of the captive monarch answered with triumphant fervor in the third stanza:

III.

"Come again, swallow! Swiftly, oh, swallow!
Bring me the message my heart waits to hear,
Tell me my lady is ready to follow."

After thee, swallow—love-breathing swallow,
Tell me she comes in her love, void of fear,
To comfort the captive, so far, yet so near,
Who whispers his love by the swallow."

Allan-a-dale burst into a passion of weeping as he sat beneath the castle walls, and ejaculated:

"It is my liege, my lord, my king! Praise God for his mercies!"

"Who sings the songs that Richard once loved?" demanded the deep voice of the captive king from the grated window above. "I cannot see down to thee, gentle minstrel, but meseemeth I know thy voice."

"My liege, it is Allan-a-dale, the companion of Blondel, and thy faithful servant," cried the minstrel. "We have sought thee far and near, my liege, and at last it is my happy, happy fortune to find thee. Oh, my king! what shall we do to save thee?"

"But one thing can be done," replied the king's voice above. "Go find Blondel. He is better known at court than thou art, my faithful Allan. Tell him to fly to England and raise my ransom at once. This coward, Duke Leopold, took me, unarmed and unawares, and is amenable to no gentle laws of honor. He needs money; let him have it. But go thou, find Blondel, and bring him hither."

"I will, my liege," cried Allan-a-dale, joyfully. "He is even now on the road hither."

So saying, he wheeled his pony and galloped off on the road he had traversed that morning, to find the more famous minstrel, to whose name the rescue of Richard is credited in history. But it was in truth our own Allan-a-dale that found King Richard in prison.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GOLDEN ARROW.

LATE in that same summer, Prince John, regent of all England, proclaimed a grand archery meeting on Hampstead Heath, to the north of the great city of London, at which the prize for the best archer in the land was to be a golden arrow, pointed with diamonds and feathered with rubies. The fame of this great meeting had spread over all England and reached even to the recesses of Sherwood and Barnesdale forests, where the outlawed Earl of Huntingdon and his merry men had made themselves loved and feared throughout the length and breadth of the land, during the past year.

The prince proclaimed that, for the three days that the games lasted, all competitors should be safe from arrest in London, and for forty miles around it; and that any Bowman who came to the meeting should be given three hours' grace after sunset of the day on which the contest closed, so that he might return safely home.

When the news of this proclamation was brought to Robin Hood, he struck his hand on his thigh and swore by St. Hubert that he would bring back that golden arrow to Sherwood, if it cost him his life.

"And an thou goest, Robin, it may cost thee more than thy life," answered Maid Marian, who heard him.

They were in the midst of the band, scattered among the green trees, as she said this. Marian had lived a strange life during that eventful year; one that seemed an impossibility for a gentle girl. In the midst of hunted, desperate outlaws, who hesitated not to slay on occasion, this young maiden had preserved not only the respect, but the absolute adoration of all the stalwart bowmen who shot the king's deer—and their keepers too—on occasion. As Robin Hood had sworn on his wedding-day, a pure maiden she had remained, occupying a solitary hut in the midst of the forest in summer; in the winter retiring to the old Saxon abbey of Ely, where the sisters preserved her secret.

In all this time, save when at the abbey,

she seldom saw a woman, but joined the band in all their forages on the cruel Norman barons, who lorded it over the neighbors and peasantry. Many and many a tall castle had been stormed by the desperate Saxon yeomen, led by Robin Hood's outlaws, and many a peasant had been made glad by the division of the noble's wealth among the poor, that always followed the forages of the outlawed earl. Poor travelers might go through Sherwood unmolested, and honest merchants were welcomed in its recesses; but the grasping and avaricious money-lender or lawyer, the unjust judge on his way to hold assizes at Nottingham; these were set upon and stripped clean, every time, no matter what the strength of their guards, if they ventured to stray within the precincts of Sherwood. The name of Robin Hood was echoed from coast to coast of the island; by the nobles and rich prelates as the "outlaw and robber;" but by the poor parish priest and all his flock as "the people's friend." Therefore it was that the news of the archery meeting was brought to Sherwood by willing feet, as soon as it reached Nottingham.

"And where is the danger, sweetheart?" asked the outlaw chief, of Maid Marian, as she uttered her warning.

"The danger is of a trap for thee and me," she answered. "This meeting is designed to catch us both; for the prince knows thy boldness, and wishes to entice thee to London, where he may slay thee or cast thee in prison, to part us two. He knows well who is the best archer in England."

"But he gives safe conduct to all," urged Robin Hood; and three hours' grace after sunset, besides."

"Who shall guard thee from being followed to the border of the sanctuary by a troop of horse, and snapped up as soon as thou crossest the line?"

"Marry, sweetheart, my own wits," he rejoined, lightly. "All I ask of thee is to stay in Barnesdale till I come again, and I will return safe with the arrow, and beard John before all his nobles."

"That I would not do for fifty golden arrows, Robin. I am thy wife in danger, thy true loving maid in safety; but thou and I must not part. Whom takest thou with thee on thy journey?"

"Only my best men: Little John, Tuck, Scathelock, Much the Miller, and George-a-Green. Would that our gentle minstrel were here, for his head is the best in the band. Why tarries Allan-a-dale, I wonder?"

"That he may find the king, Robin. I tell thee he will not come back till he find him. Well, be it so. I will go with thy chosen five. So shall we be seven good men and true, with Robin for leader. Vex me not by refusal, for I will go with thee."

And Maid Marian set her little white teeth firmly as she spoke, in a way that Robin Hood knew well indicated a determination he could not overcome.

Early the next day the little party started on their perilous journey to London, equipped as country merchants on a trading-trip. They were well provided with horseflesh, thanks to their raids on the barons in the neighborhood. Robin had collected all the steeds of eastern blood that had been brought home by the crusading nobles at various times. These horses, light and elegant as they were, held but a low rank in Europe in those days, when the favorite ideal of a war-steed was a huge animal of sixteen hands, weighing twelve or thirteen hundred, and capable of carrying a mail-clad rider in full panoply. The practical sense of the outlaw showed him that such animals were useless to him and his lightly armed followers, who needed speed more than weight to escape the shock of numbers. He had accordingly chosen the lighter horses wherever he found them.

Each rider led behind him a sober, steady pack-horse, on which his weapons were stowed away under bales of merchandise, and so they jogged on to London, in the most peaceful guise then practiced. Many a lordly baron sneered at the lowly traders as they passed him on the road, but the disguised outlaws went quietly on their way till they reached the boundary of the land of safety, where they halted at a tavern kept by a secret friend of theirs, and changed their apparel.

Thenceforward they went on foot to London, openly and undisguised, in their habits as archers. Only this change they made, that all dressed in scarlet velvet, with white hose; and each man bore on his buckler a moon and stars of silver.

They reached the practicing-ground at noon of the first day, just as the games were about to begin, and mingled unnoticed in the press with the throng of gayly-dressed archers that crowded the lists. None of them shot on the first day; and on the second, only Maid Marian and Friar Tuck entered for the prize; shooting so well that the sturdy yeomen crowded to see them. Both won prizes which they received without being recognized, for Prince John had not come on the ground as yet.

The third day was to be the grand one. In the opening trials no one was allowed to take a second shot who could not strike the bull's-eye every time, and a single miss disqualified the archer from further competition. On this day the prince arrived early, and at once inquired whether any wonderful shooting had been done, hoping thus to find Robin Hood.

Much to his mortification, he was told that the marksmanship had been decidedly poor, and at once jumped to the conclusion that his old enemy had not come to the meeting.

Concealing his chagrin as he might, he ordered the games to proceed. The first trial was at the two-hundred-yard target, black with a small white bull's-eye, and no rings to count.

Out of two hundred bowmen present, only thirty-five had success enough to earn a second shot, and further and severer trial reduced that number to three. Then it was that the seven strangers in scarlet advanced to the scratch, and shot their arrows together with such marvelous skill, that all seven quivered in a sheaf in the midst of the white bull's-eye. A dead silence of amazement was succeeded by a loud roar of applause, amid which John started up on his throne and cried aloud:

"It must be the band of the outlaw! Such shooting was never done save by the devil or Robin Hood!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WORD OF A PRINCE.

THE sudden exclamation of Prince John was followed by a silence among the courtiers, and then the whisper began to pass through the outskirts of the crowd, that "Robin Hood was come to London."

In an incredibly short time every person of the many thousands on the heath was shouting "Robin Hood forever! The people's friend!" at the top of his or her voice, while an indescribable scene of confusion ensued. Such pushing and crowding for front places, such trampling and scuffling, never were seen before at an archery meeting. The brilliant retinue of the prince, which had before attracted all eyes, became a subject of secondary interest in the presence of the renowned outlaw chief. John sunk back on his seat, pale with mortification, as he heard the shouts of joy which told him that his own unjust outlawry of the Earl of Huntington had resulted in making his rival the most popular man in the country.

Meanwhile, in the midst of all this clamor, the roped inclosure of the lists remained free of all save the little group of competitors and the officers of the games.

The three archers who had survived the preliminary test were all king's keepers, stalwart fellows in green livery, and they stood staring with amazement at the party of seven in scarlet who had just performed such an amazing feat with perfect coolness.

"Well, sir marshal," said Robin Hood to the official in attendance, regardless of the clamor outside the lists, "which target shall we shoot at now? We have spoiled one bull's-eye for the Londoners."

"Take the other butt, in St. Hubert's name," replied the marshal, in tones of wonder. "Such shooting never saw I before!"

At the end of the list were two banks of earth about forty feet high and broad, called "butts," on which the targets were placed. The second butt presented nothing but an apple, hung by a string in front of a white cloth for the second trial. At that distance it was hardly visible, save as a brown speck.

"Tis manners to let the king's men shoot first," observed the outlaw chief. "Take good aim, friends, and miss not the apple."

With ut a word, but looking anxious and pre-occupied at the formidable rivals suddenly disclosed to them, the three keepers advanced to the scratch, took long and careful aim, and shot, one after the other. The first missed the apple as a puff of wind waved it aside, the second grazed it slightly, as could be seen by its sudden

jump to one side, but the third struck it fair and nailed it fast to the butt. With faces of deep mortification the other two at once retired, leaving but one competitor against Robin Hood.

"What is thy name, good fellow?" asked the outlaw in a careless tone, as he advanced to the scratch.

"My name is Clym o' the Clough," replied the keeper in a deep bass voice. "Worse luck for me, when I left the merry town of Loxley to be a king's keeper, or I might be with bold Robin Hood to-day."

"An thou shoot as well all the time, Clym, thou canst roam the woods with me forever, for I am Robin Hood," observed the other, coolly. "Well, I am sorry for thine arrow, for I must split it. See!"

As he spoke he drew the shaft to its head, loosed the string, and away flew the arrow of Clym o' the Clough, shivered to pieces, the apple disappearing in fragments under the shock.

By this time the people had settled down in silence to watch the shooting, for the news that Robin Hood was present had caused an absorbing interest in the target.

"This is but poor sport," continued the outlaw to the marshal. "Set up a swinging apple. There is your true woodman's mark."

The marshal, who was on horseback, galloped to the butts, and a few minutes later a long rod was waved from the top of the butt, hanging from which, by a slender line, was another apple, swinging to and fro, the holder of the rod protected from stray shots by a huge square steel shield, called a *pavesse*.

"Now, lads, shoot away," cried Robin Hood, and forth stepped Little John, followed by the others in succession, down even to Maid Marian. When all had shot, the apple was full of arrows and resembled a shuttlecock. Then Robin Hood took a careful aim, and once more the apple flew all to pieces, while the other arrows fell to the ground. He had broken the bunch.

"Captain, I yield," said Clym o' the Clough, frankly. "Your men have left me no mark to shoot at, and I am not fit to join Robin Hood's band."

"Tush, man, never give up," responded the chief. "See, he has slung another apple. Try thy luck!"

The keeper obeyed and struck the apple fairly, when Robin Hood clapped him on the shoulder.

"Now by St. Hubert, my brave Clym," he exclaimed, "an thou'lt follow me to Sherwood, thou shalt have the livery of Robin Hood's merry men and twenty pounds a year to boot. Wilt come?"

"Captain, I will," replied the tall yeoman, heartily, "for I serve none but the best man in England, and thou art he, since the good king Richard is gone away. As for this John, he is but—" and the archer spat on the ground with an expression of strong disgust.

"Be it so," answered Robin. "Now for the last trial and the prize of the day."

The final test had indeed come. A man on horseback, carrying a long slender lance, on the top of which fluttered on a crossbar a pigeon tied by a long string, was to ride across the butts from right to left at full gallop, the archers to shoot at the pigeon successively. The irregular motion of horse and bird made the task one of extraordinary difficulty, and one after another tried and failed. Little John and Scathelock struck the perch, but neither hit the bird. At last came Robin Hood's turn, when all had retired. The outlaw chief took his station calmly, suddenly drew his bow with a steady motion just as the pigeon paused at the end of its cord, and the next moment a mighty roar of applause announced that the bird was transfixed.

"The arrow to Robin Hood! The archer king!" shouted the people, and the marshal came up at a gallop, crying: "By St. Hubert, good fellow, whoever thou art, Robin Hood or the devil, the golden arrow is thine, and the Prince wills that thou come at once to receive it."

"Follow me all, and keep your quivers ready," said the outlaw in a low, resolute tone. "The games are over, but the fun is about to begin. Marian, sweetheart, keep close, for Heaven's good love."

So saying, the little band, accompanied by Clym o' the Clough, walked calmly across the lists to the foot of the throne on which sat Prince John, surrounded by his nobles, and bearing in his hand the golden arrow. As Robin Hood approached, the eyes of the base prince glowed with joy, for he instantly recognized his old rival and Marian in her forest attire. The archers stood before the throne amid a deep

silence for fully a minute, when John at last spoke.

"Friend archer, what is thy name—thou who hast won the golden arrow?"

"My name is Robin Hood," answered the outlaw boldly. "I came hither on the plighted faith of John of England, to shoot for the golden arrow, and return to my home in safety."

"The arrow is thine," said the prince, coldly.

"Take it. I have rewarded thee for thy shooting. Now I will punish thee for thy treason. Robin Fitzooth, outlawed Earl of Huntington, I attach thee for a traitor. Seize him and his men, and yonder woman in male attire. To the Tower with them!"

Had a thunderbolt fallen, the courtiers could not have been more astonished. No one stirred to execute the order. Robin Hood alone seemed to feel no dismay, as he said, bitterly:

"I have found to-day the value of the word of a prince. John of England, thou hast called me a traitor. Thou liest."

So saying, he and his men started back and drew their bows, even to Clym o' the Clough, threatening the courtiers all round.

The scene of confusion that ensued was amazing. A cry of "Rescue! Rescue!" burst from the enormous crowd, and in a moment guards, prince, courtiers and all, were swept away by the tumultuous rush of the London mob, while the outlaws were hustled away in the opposite direction by hundreds of friendly, if unwashed hands.

A regular riot of true medieval proportions ensued, as the men-at-arms of the prince, seeing their master's danger, came galloping down into the press, striking down with their lance-blades on the heads of the people, while stones and clubs were freely used by the excited citizens. The riot was eventually quelled, but not without some shedding of blood; and by the time it was over, the outlaw's party was out of the sanctuary limits and riding gayly away to the north, no longer as peaceful peddlers, but in all their bravery of bow and buckler, with Clym o' the Clough in their midst. That stout keeper had torn off the insignia of the royal livery on reaching the limit, and now wore the scarlet of Robin Hood, to be exchanged for the forest green when he arrived at Sherwood.

The hue and cry was started after them; but in those days that was of little consequence to a rapid traveler; and long before it had reached Nottingham they were safe in the leafy recesses of Sherwood forest.

"Thou seest, sweetheart, I have won the arrow and saved my head into the bargain," cried Robin Hood that night, as they stood by the blazing fire, surrounded by their idolizing men.

"I never doubted that my Robin would win it," she rejoined, smiling; "but if I were not by thee to warn thee, that head of thine would fall many a time from its owner's rashness."

Scathelock and Friar Tuck were regaling their hearers with a recital of their London adventures, and Clym o' the Clough was greeting his new comrades, as Marian sighed deeply and murmured: "And yet we are only outlaws and thieves to the world."

Robin Hood started and gazed at her anxiously a moment, then turned away his head with an echoing sigh.

"Too true, sweetheart," he said; "I have brought thee to this by my spendthrift ways, that thou art an outlaw's bride and that other women shun thee. Would to God we had never met, for thou mightst be still the happy Marian Fitz Walter."

In a moment her arms were round him.

"Robin! Love! I would die for thee ten times over," she murmured. "It is not that, but—when I know thy worth and valor—to see thee here—oh! Robin, if Allan-a-dale were only back."

"He will be back, sweetheart," answered the outlaw in a more cheering tone. "This heaviness cannot last forever. 'Tis now the early leaf time of June. If he come not before the hazel nuts are ripe we may indeed fear; but 'tis three months to that now. Come, they call us to supper, and we must not be gloomy. While I am Robin Hood be thou our blithe Maid Marian, and let us throw [care to the dogs under the greenwood tree.]"

Hardly had he spoken when the distant note of a bugle, sweet, sad, and echoing over hill and dale, struck on their ears. All the outlaws started up and listened. The call was repeated and Robin Hood cried aloud:

"It is Allan-a-dale. I would know his call among a thousand. He has found the king. Scour the woods and answer him blithely, merry men all."

An hour later, the wandering minstrel, pale

and travel-worn, rode into their camp and greeted Robin with the glad news:

"King Richard will be back in England in three days. I found him in prison and Queen Eleanor has ransomed her son for twenty thousand marks."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BISHOP'S BUFFET.

It was on a warm, pleasant day, late in June, when the birds were singing their sweetest songs and all Sherwood Forest was a paradise of green, that Robin Hood lay on his back under a spreading beech-tree near the Nottingham road, and listened to the woodland chorus. The outlaw chief had a deep frown on his brow, and seemed as if out of tune with the harmonies of nature; for three long weeks had passed since the return of Allan-a-dale, and still they had no news from the king. Robin Hood had counted confidently on the boyish friendship that had once existed between himself and Richard, and on the injustice done him by John, to operate in his favor and secure his pardon from the king, so as to insure his return to the society of his fellows. When the days passed on, and still no news of the king, save that he had landed and resumed his crown, the outlawed earl grew hard and bitter in his heart. He had long been weary of the wild life he was leading, with the hand of every man against him; and this feeling had increased in intensity ever since he found that his gentle Marian, till then so cheerful, shared his own discontent and unhappiness. Now, as he lay watching the road, he muttered bitterly:

"Robber and outlaw they call me; but who made me so? His brother. And now, forsooth, justice and old friendship must give way, because John is the king's brother and I am nothing but the dupe of a crafty priest, my mother's brother, who has robbed his own flesh and blood to fill—forsooth—the treasury of the church. Out on these ravenous bishops and abbots, wolves in sheep's clothing who rob the helpless! Let me but see one of them come down this road to-day, and by St. Hubert I will strip him clean to pay for the name he and his fat friends have fastened on me!"

Even while he spoke he heard the distant tinkle of mule-bells on the road, and started to his feet, full of delight.

"He comes into the trap like a fool, whoever he be," cried Robin Hood with fierce joy. "Let us see if he will go out from Sherwood as easily as he came in."

He drew back behind a tree to watch, and peered eagerly out on the road. As he had expected from the mule-bells, it was the train of an ecclesiastic, a tall man of imposing figure and venerable white beard, followed by a train of nearly forty monks riding two and two. The purple robes of the dignified leader announced him as a bishop, and the long train of sumpter-mules behind gave promise of a goodly booty to the outlaw's band.

Robin Hood waited till the train of monks was well in front of him, when he set his bugle to his lips and blew the summons that he knew would bring his men to his aid. As he did so, he noticed that the strange bishop drew rein in the road to listen, while all the train halted.

"Marry, this fellow must be a stranger indeed," muttered the chief. "I am almost ashamed to take him so easily. A Nottingham abbot, now, would have given us a smart run for our pains. Here they come!"

A hasty rustle in the brushwood was followed by the appearance of the outlaws, trooping in from every side, and then Robin sprung into the road, seized the bridle of the strange bishop and cried:

"Halt, sir bishop, for I am Robin Hood."

The tall prelate looked down at him with a face of grave composure not unmixed with sternness, but entirely devoid of fear, as he said: "I am halted already, my son. What wouldst thou?"

"First, your reverence's trunks, gold, silver, jewels and fine clothes, all but what you wear. Second, the honor of your reverence's company to dinner under the greenwood tree of merry Sherwood."

The bishop laughed.

"Truly, my son, the second invitation is better than the first. I will dine with thee first, and thou shalt take thy pay afterward. Will that please thee?"

Robin Hood's countenance cleared up, for he loved a brave man; and it was evident that the bishop was no coward.

"Agreed, father. Your reverence shall not

be molested, save as becomes the customs of Sherwood."

So saying, he led the bishop into the woods, away from the road, followed by all the outlaws, over hills and down dales, till they arrived at the celebrated silvan fortress to which the outlaws were wont to retreat whenever pursuit was hot, surrounded by impenetrable bogs, with but one narrow path of entrance. Once inside the circuit of quagmire the spot was charming, being a sort of island of several hundred acres in extent, covered with the noblest trees in Sherwood and abounding in game. As they approached, the smoke of huge fires under the trees and the savory smell of roasting game announced that the dinner hour was approaching, when the domestic economy of the outlaws could be studied at leisure.

The strange bishop dismounted from his mule, an example followed by his monks, and surveyed the scene with much interest.

"So this is thy home and thou art Robin Hood?" he said in a tone of inquiry. "And where is the Lady Marian Fitzwalter, stolen from her father by thee, thou lawless one?"

"The Lady Marian Fitzwalter is no more," answered a sweet voice by his side. "Maid Marian, the outlaw's bride, is here, a lawful wife by the rules of your own church."

The white-bearded bishop started as he turned, and his hand went up to his cap as he bowed, in a manner suggestive of the court rather than the church. Then his face flushed as he said, confusedly:

"I forgot—Bless thee, my child—my blessing—I was a soldier once, and I forget the priest in the soldier now and again. Bless thee, bless thee for a pretty little dove!"

As the girl sunk on her knees, he placed his hands on each side of her face and lifted her up with a sounding kiss that smacked more of the camp than the convent. Then he turned abruptly on Robin Hood and said sternly:

"How comes it, ribald and robber, that I find thee here, plundering the church and keeping the realm in confusion with thy bad deeds? Art thou not ashamed of thyself?"

"No!" thundered Robin Hood fiercely. "What has this church of which you prate done to me but rob me of my mother's heritage through my own flesh and blood? Ask the fat Bishop of Hereford and Prince John of England, whose treachery drove me to the woods. I tell thee, priest, I care not what I do now. I thought I had a friend in Richard of England, but even he has turned against me now—"

"How know'st thou that?" demanded the stranger, sharply.

"I sent him a letter telling my woes, and he has now been three weeks in England and is not here."

"And so thou thinkest in thy wisdom that Richard has naught else to do but attend to thy wants, thou most noted robber in the kingdom," cried the priest, angrily. "Hark thee, sirrah, if thy mother's brother defrauded thee, is that any reason thou shouldst make war on all priests? If my mule kick me, is that a reason I should kill every mule in the kingdom? Go to, sinner, and repent thee of thy sins, or thou wilt repent too late."

The outlaw chief turned white with rage to be thus rated before his men, and he ground out between his teeth:

"Hark ye, sir priest, thou art my guest till after dinner, but beware thy tongue, or thou must stand a buffet from me ere grace is said."

"Strike, then," said the bishop coolly, coming close to him. "I'll stand it now."

With all the strength of concentrated anger, Robin struck the other a tremendous blow on the side of the head with his open palm, and the next moment received such a stunning return on his own head from the palm of the stalwart bishop, that he rolled over on the grass and stared stupidly up at the sky, almost senseless.

"Now, my son," quoth the ecclesiastic calmly, looking down at him, "an thou wishest to keep a whole skin in my presence, treat the church with civility."

Robin Hood rose slowly to his feet and stared at the bishop for several moments in silence. Then he shook his head and muttered:

"I thought but one man in England could do that, but it seemeth there are two."

Then he resumed his ordinary demeanor, bowed low to the bishop and observed:

"Your reverence has taught me a lesson I deserved for striking my guest. Will't please you sit to dinner?"

"Right willingly," replied the strong bishop, resuming his wonted gravity and good-humor.

"Who is thy cook here in the greenwood?"

"Marry, that am I, sir," answered the voice of Friar Tuck, who, girt with a huge apron, was serving one of the long tables under the trees. "Tis a thankless task, your reverence, to tame these wild spirits, and I often despair."

"Then why not return to thy convent?" asked the bishop gravely.

"Marry, sir, for the best of reasons, none would have me save as a cellarer, and they say I drink too much wine if they give me the keys."

"Then quit wine-bibbing and live soberly, thou graceless varlet," quoth the bishop sternly. Up fired Tuck in a moment and cried:

"I am no varlet of thine, priest. The captain shoots well with the long bow, but he is no hand at a buffet. I have laid out as big men as thee, ere now."

As he spoke, the brawny friar tucked up his sleeve and strode straight toward the bishop.

Nothing loth, the stranger rose from his seat and met the friar half-way. In the old game of buffets there was no guarding or dodging. It was a mere trial of main strength and endurance, each man giving the other a swinging box on the ear at the same moment.

The game between bishop and friar was short. The bishop seemed to have an unlimited supply of strength, for he sent the friar flying, heels over head, on the grass, and then observed, as coolly as ever:

"Go to, thou naughty varlet. Back to thy convent or to a hermitage, ere thy hair grow gray and it be too late."

At this second exhibition of the other's strength, Robin Hood suddenly started up, and advanced excitedly to the bishop, demanding in tones of eagerness:

"Tell me in God's name, who are you?"

The strange bishop turned round and surveyed the scene about him with a proud smile. All the outlaws had formed a ring and were gazing at him with open eyes.

"Wouldst thou know indeed who I am, Robin?" he asked, in a meaning tone of voice. As he spoke, he cast at his feet the white beard and wig he had worn, flung off his violet robes, and stood revealed, a grand-looking knight, in complete armor.

"I ask no more," cried Robin Hood, rushing forward. "Merry men all, shout aloud, Long live King Richard the Lion Heart!"

Such a shout as went up then made the arches of Sherwood ring again, as Robin fell on his knees at the feet of the king, while Maid Marian bedewed his hands with her tears and kisses.

"Oh Richard, oh, my king! At last! at last!" cried Robin in a choking voice. "Pardon the outlaw who never would have gone astray had the king himself been here. I yield me, rescue or no rescue."

The king looked tenderly down at the lovers.

"Thou hast been foully treated, Robin, but thou hast done amiss to turn common robber, and bring this tender bird here into the wild woods. Nay, I know thy dire temptations; and had I been in thy place I might have done the same, for Richard Plantagenet is but a man. Rise up, Robin, Earl of Huntington, and claim thy bride before God and man henceforth. As for the rest of thy men, 'tis pity such stout fellows should go a-begging or stealing for bread, when the king needs good archers so badly. Henceforth, they shall wear the leopards of England on their livery, and be known as the archers of the guard to Richard of England."

"And must I truly go back to my convent?" moaned a dolorous voice, as Friar Tuck stood by, rubbing his sore ear.

The king laughed.

"Nay, that were a sin for a cook like thee. Thou shalt be father confessor and chief cook to the band, and have twenty marks a year."

The friar retired, with his face on a broad grin, and the king continued:

"Take back thy bride to Loxley Castle at once, Robin. Thine uncle Gilbert is dead, and on his death-bed has restored thee all thy lands. For the future, remember one thing: live within thy money or thou wilt find thy money go from thee, like water from a leaky cask. Once thine improvidence has turned the Earl of Huntington into a beggarly robber and outlaw. See that henceforth thou livest so as to cast no reproach on thine ancient name."

Robin kissed the king's hand and then turned to Marian.

"Sweet wife," he whispered, "now thou art no more an Outlaw, but the proud wife of

"ROBIN HOOD."

THE END.

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